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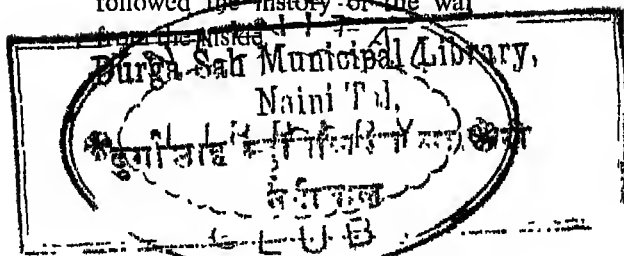
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# PORTRAIT OF CHURCHILL



"May God prosper our arms in the noble adventure, after our long struggle for King and country, for dear life and for the freedom of mankind."

——*Mr. Churchill's message to the troops as the last Battle of the Rhine began, March 23, 1945.*



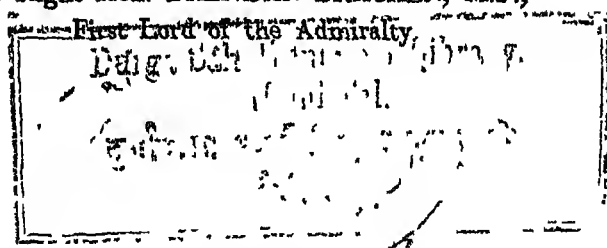


LOOKING FORWARD

# PORTRAIT OF CHURCHILL

*By*  
GUY EDEN

With a Foreword by  
The Right Hon. BRENDAN BRACKEN, M.P.,



*With 16 Illustrations*

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## FOREWORD

BY THE RIGHT HONOURABLE BRENDAN BRACKEN, M.P.

I AM glad of the opportunity to commend Guy Eden's book about Mr. Churchill to the many readers it deserves. I have spent a great deal of time in the last four years in the company of that mysterious body of newspapermen called Lobby Correspondents of which Guy Eden is a distinguished member. The Lobby Correspondents hear every secret, keep every secret, and publish nothing that is off-the-record. Never did a body of men do more to preserve Ministers' reputations for discretion.

I daresay I have held more Press conferences and met more newspapermen than any other British Minister, and therefore I am in the best of positions to know all the ability and energy that Guy Eden brings to his work. He has been in Parliamentary life longer than most Members of Parliament.

He is a keen observer ; he knows what goes on in the back rooms of politics ; he has followed the history of the war from the inside. Above all he is known for his independent views about the great ones of the earth. His portrait of Mr. Churchill shows a great leader ceaselessly toiling towards victory in the midst of turbulent military and political events.

It is a candid study of Britain's greatest fighter in the perils of the Fighting Forties.

*Brendan Bracken*

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THE name of Winston Churchill runs like a thread through the history of this century.

He has made his indelible mark on the story of our times—on the history of all time. Nor can there be any doubt—there never was in the case of a man of action—that he will have his critics in the future, as in the past and in the present. He will have his detractors. And there will be those who will over-praise him.

His doings in the war are so near to us that we cannot, perhaps, appreciate their magnitude. Perhaps, on the other hand, we cannot get a true picture of his failings and shortcomings; for Winston Churchill is, above all, a human being, and, as such, has his share of failings and shortcomings. Certainly we are unable to get a picture in the perspective history will afford. Certainly we over-laud him, or we give him less than his due. That is inevitable.

Yet—a clear picture of him we assuredly ought to have. We of this generation ought to know our Winston Churchill. Unless we can get in our minds a clear picture of him, we shall not get a clear picture of the history of our own times. Unless we see him plainly, we shall not see history plainly, we shall not be able to make up our minds whether he is a truly great man or a small one magnified.

It is a rule that, before Parliament will authorize the erection of a statue to some notable public figure, ten years must have elapsed since his death.

Maybe there is material for the cynics in that, but it is commentary enough on the fleeting nature of fame, on the transient texture of the applause of men, the gratitude of a people. It is as it should be. Men do not serve this land for the gain, the hope of fame. When the call comes, men of all Parties and of none—to borrow Mr. Churchill's own phrase—leap into the public service and count the cost, if at all, afterwards, not before.

It has often been said—and not only by the disappointed and soured—that there is no gratitude in politics. Although this, like most generalizations, is but a half-truth, one might say that there is little or no memory in politics—for the good things a man does, at any rate—and that the good is oft interred with his bones, however much the evil (real or alleged) that he does lives after him.

Many years ago, in his first important speech in the House of Commons, the then youthful Winston Churchill described an event as being ‘half-forgotten, because it has passed into that period of twilight which intervenes between the bright glare of newspaper controversy and the calm light of history.’

Perhaps, in some respects, that description may be applied to the services of Winston Churchill to the world in the war. The fierce glare that beats about the Premiership of this land, especially in wartime, is not the best ray by which to see the light and shade that make the character of a man. We are standing too near to it all to see the picture whole. We know him as Britain’s chief Architect of Victory. And, as we recall that, for a fateful year that seemed a century, Britain stood alone against the almost-all-conquering might of the German Third Reich, we may well think that he was the Architect of all Democracy’s victory over Dictatorship. Yet, in the nature of things, we cannot yet know or appreciate just *how* great his contribution to the triumph of Democracy has been.

Events have been too swift and sudden and dramatic to permit of our seeing yet either him or his work as a whole. We have all, in this tight little island and overseas, been too busy keeping alive, amid the terrors of the air and sea and land, to spare the time for that demonstrative hero-worship to which we never, in any case, take too kindly. The over-riding need for secrecy has ruled out many revealing glimpses we might otherwise have had of the Man on the Bridge.

Churchill is perhaps the most-written-about and the most-photographed man of our time. Biographies, good, bad and indifferent, abound. Every photographer must be loaded with his portraits. Yet few know much about

him when he is out of the limelight, and (as far as any Prime Minister ever is) off-duty. He is a great national figure, whose every word and movement may seem to have been chronicled. Yet to many people he is as impersonal, almost, as a waxwork figure in a show, as unreal as a hero of the celluloid world of Hollywood.

Is not an actor a man with a heart like me? demanded Punchinello. Well might one ask: Is not a national leader a man with a heart, and a temper, and whims and fancies, and prejudices and preferences, and successes and failures—like all of us? Is not, in short, a national leader also a human being?

The answer, as Mr. Churchill himself might say in an off-moment, is in the affirmative. The object of this small volume, therefore, is to present a close-up of Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill, His Majesty's First Minister and Minister of Defence in the greatest century of our history, in something of the light in which he is seen by those immediately around him—not in the light of those who glimpse him from afar. The object is to show him, not so much as the Great One, who is cheered and photographed and listened to, but as the human being, with a human being's faults and likable ways. In short—the cliché had to come—Winston Churchill, The Man.

It is emphatically not a biography. Pens with more time and fluency at their disposal than mine must essay that giant's task. It cannot even be a complete account of his wartime activities. The time is not yet when all that must go to that balance sheet can be shaken clear of the entangling grip of "Security."

It is no more than a character sketch of Winston Churchill, offered in an attempt to show him as a human being as well as The Man Who Won the War. A lot will be left out. Perhaps everybody will not agree that the picture is an accurate one. But, so far as possible, I shall let the recitals of events piece themselves together, to form a jig-saw of Churchill as I, after many years' close observation, see him.

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## CHAPTER THE FIRST

### THE WAR BEGINS

IN the course of my life as a journalist, I have lived through some periods of tension which, with the inner knowledge of affairs one inevitably has, have borne heavily on the mind and body. But never—even in the 1914-18 war—do I recall a tension and strain so intolerable as that of the first days of September, 1939.

The war was coming slowly and coldly upon us. There was no excitement, no war-fever, to divert attention from the meaning of it all. Just the cold, calm, methodical preparation for the storm that was to come, with no illusions about the ordeal that was to be Britain's and the world's. Some of the preparations made, necessary as they were, were grim in the extreme. I remember, some weeks before war came, meeting an Alderman of one of the London Boroughs, who looked thoroughly shaken and ill. When I inquired what was wrong, he explained that he had just been to a committee meeting at which plans had been made for the storage of scores of thousands of cardboard coffins, to meet the demand that might arise when intensive air-raids on London began.

That particular bit of foresight, thank goodness, was proved wrong by the event, but it was typical of the grim, realistic frame of mind in which Britain moved—drifted is not the word—towards war.

No one, I am sure, who sat through the proceedings of the House of Commons on September 1 and 2 will ever forget the atmosphere of tension. Other pens than mine—possibly Mr. Churchill's own—must tell the story of what was happening behind the scenes on those fateful days, of the comings and goings, the exchanges between the British and other Allied Governments. I will say only this, with some knowledge of the events: When the full story comes to be told, the British Government's part in it will be



something we shall be proud to have recorded in our national history. Whether the same can be said of the part played by other Governments is not so sure.

What was going on behind the scenes did not greatly concern most people ; what was going on before the scenes was drama enough for most.

On September 1, Hitler's armies and air forces were already hacking their way into Poland, with all the horrors of the powerful and seemingly invincible Wehrmacht full out against the brave, strongly resisting, but comparatively powerless Poles.

War was creeping nearer and nearer to Britain. Storm clouds, which had been gathering for months, were now forming an almost impenetrable pall, blotting out the sun of hope.

But the blackout was only the outward and visible sign of the grimness that descended on the British people as August faded into September—and September faded into the second World War in the lifetime of many who were to take part in it. As usual, with the grimness went a dogged determination to see the thing through, to get victory, whatever the cost. There was no excitement, people did not charge down Whitehall in shouting, cheering, singing crowds ; there were no scenes at the German Embassy in Carlton House Terrace, with its more-than-lifesize painting of Hitler in the hall. In 1914, perhaps, people thought of war as something exciting and glamorous.

In 1939, the people of Britain went into the war in cold blood, knowing full well that there was no glamour, that there was little but grief and suffering before them, that the way ahead was hard, but that it was preferable to dishonour. There was no patriotic posing ; just a calm tackling of a job that had to be done.

History will not omit from her balance-sheet the fact that Britain went into the war voluntarily, compelled only by a sense of honour, or that she spurned offers (made subtly and persistently through roundabout routes) of a "carve-up" of Russia and the smaller nations, with Britain and Germany as the only gainers.

Winston Churchill was present at those fateful meetings

of Parliament as Fate raced Britain once more into war. I know that, although he was not then a Minister, his views were eagerly sought by the Government, and that he was many times consulted.

On the evening of Friday, September 1, M.P.s, Peers, Ambassadors, Pressmen, crowded into the debating Chamber of the House of Commons to hear the latest news. There was little, and it was a brief sitting. Everybody was looking at Churchill, sitting, his face lined with grief, in his accustomed seat. Some expected him to burst tempestuously into the debate. But he said nothing. For once, he did not even talk freely to the Members who crowded around him as he left.

If the sitting on September 1 had been tense, that of September 2 was almost intolerable in its atmosphere of suspense. It was the first time for many years that the House had sat on a Saturday—a fact which, in itself, greatly increased the feeling of crisis and uneasiness. Not easily is the British week-end thus violated. But Members were there in force to hear a statement from Mr. Neville Chamberlain about developments in the fighting in Poland. In the "diplomatic situation," as it was called, there was no development.

There followed hours of suspense such as I have never experienced before or since, and which I hope never to endure again. There was an agonizing series of adjournments, none knew for what purpose. None, that is, except the Cabinet and a few trusted Privy Councillors. What on earth was going on? The Cabinet was in almost unbroken session, in the Prime Minister's big oak-furnished room behind the Speaker's Chair, as the soft beat of the lovely old grandfather clock, which turned its calm face to the hurrying scone outside, ticked away the hours of peace. Now and then, the Prime Minister hurried into the House to make a brief announcement that there was nothing new to say.

I remember talking that afternoon to a man who had been working almost day and night to prepare the country for the war that seemed inevitable. He had seen the whole thing through with smiling efficiency. But, as we

talked, buses passed by the window of his office, loaded with excited, shouting children bound for the vast adventure of "the country," with its hundred-and-one surprises and mysteries.

My companion turned his head to look at them—and kept it averted for a long time. When he turned it again, there were tears in his eyes. "London's going to seem funny without the kids!" he said.

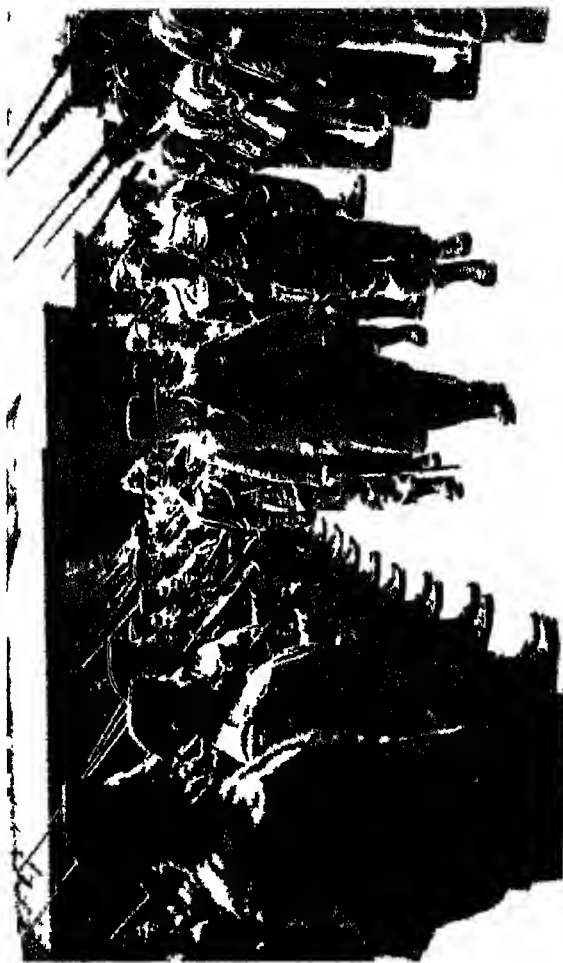
That first evacuation, in response to the orders of the Pied Piper of War, was perhaps the most moving thing of that moving day.

All the time, the world waited with bated breath. At long last, Mr. Chamberlain hurried in again, some scribbled notes in his hand. He held out little hope of avoiding war, seemed slightly astonished at the restless attitude of the House. Calm writers of the future, looking back on that scene, may feel, with me, that the House was not at its best that evening, that it was a trifle hysterical perhaps, however faithfully, in other respects, it mirrored the mood of the nation. I recall that Mr. Arthur Greenwood, Acting Leader of the Socialist Party, got up with a demand for action; I remember the cry to him: "Speak for England!"

And I remember that the House adjourned that night at once excited and depressed, a little anxious, a little mystified by the events of the day, but quite determined that it was war. Above all, I recall that silent figure in the corner of the front bench below the gangway, and how he got up and walked slowly and silently out, alone.

At nine o'clock next morning—it was a bright Sunday morning, the sort of morning on which one normally hurried off for a few hours in the quiet of the country—the ultimatum was presented, announcing that, unless the German army were withdrawn from Poland forthwith, a state of war would exist between Britain and Germany, as from eleven o'clock that morning.

It was in this atmosphere that Winston Churchill joined the Government. Mr. Chamberlain called him into the Cabinet Room, offering membership of the small War Cabinet it was proposed to set up.



# INSPECTING PARLIAMENT'S HOME GUARD

The author is the officer immediately behind the Premier, to the right

DIRECTIVE TO GENERAL ALEXANDER

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF IN THE MIDDLE EAST

1. Your prime and main duty will be to take or destroy at the earliest opportunity the German-Italian army commanded by Field-Marshal Rommel, together with all its supplies and establishments in Egypt and Libya.
2. You will discharge or cause to be discharged such other duties as pertain to your Command without prejudice to the task described in paragraph 1, which must be considered paramount in His Majesty's interests.

*David G. G. G. G.*

ALEXANDER DIRECTIVE

To the point! Churchill's order to Field-Marshal Alexander to eject the enemy from Africa.

Churchill's reply was simple: "Certainly! I am at your service!"

The first idea was to give him membership of the War Cabinet without a Department. This he accepted, but during the day he was offered the post of First Lord of the Admiralty—the very office in which he had opened World War I in 1914. He accepted.

Historians will perhaps discover that, as the war began, Churchill uttered some piece of deathless oratory, some dramatic phrase like Edward Grey's: "The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime!"

I am able to record his actual first words of the war, which, if less dramatic, are at least characteristic. It happened that he was dressing in his Westminster flat when that first air-raid warning of the war—a few minutes after the Prime Minister's voice had announced over the radio that peace had died, war had been born—screamed out.

Winston paused, his collar half on, and turned to his friend Brendan Bracken (later his Minister of Information), with the dry and grudgingly admiring comment: "You know, Brendan, you've got to hand it to that blighter [free transcription] Hitler. The war's been on only a few minutes, and here's an air-raid already!"

Perhaps his mind went back to that occasion in 1914, when, a few minutes after the ultimatum had expired, *he* was able to send to a fully mobilized Fleet the crisp order: "Begin hostilities against Germany."

But, to the general surprise, the alert was not followed by an air-raid, even though it had seemed the most "likely" of all the many air-raid warnings London and other parts of Britain were to hear as the war years wore on. Londoners looked curiously at the blue skies, went on with their business, smiled a little superior smile at the few who went into the shelters. But the arch-priest of the "Blitzkrieg" did not strike. The alert was caused, so it was said, by a belated plane from the Continent, bringing home some diplomatic stragglers. But the reaction, the screaming sirens, the activities of the air-raid wardens, showed that Britain was on her toes.

Down in the streets, lorries loaded with arms and men hurried by; red-capped military policemen skilfully shepherded the traffic into neat lines. In Whitehall, grim-faced men and women hurried along to offer their services to the Government, or to take up duties already undertaken. In cars and on foot, Members of both Houses of Parliament made their way to the Palace of Westminster for the first Sunday sitting for decades. Nervously or hopefully, people bought Sunday papers, hastily scanned the headlines, flung the papers aside.

Policemen self-consciously produced for the first time the blue-painted steel helmets with the word "Police" roughly stencilled on them, which, in years to come, many a stricken air-raid victim was to bless as its wearer clawed a way out of some bomb-shattered building, or helped the maimed and wounded to safety. But then they wore their new headgear with the somewhat inane expressions British men assume in such circumstances. The red omnibuses sped on their way, their windows not yet obscured with splinter-netting, men still on the conductor's platform.

It was not, as I recall it, an air of tension on that sunlit Sunday morning. It was, rather, an air of relaxation, as at the lifting or lightening of an unbearable burden. For this war had come upon us slowly, with many premonitory rumblings and roarings. And we had met it calmly and coldly.

All the same, the final break was a shock. Grim indeed must have been Mr. Churchill's feelings as he listened to Mr. Chamberlain's sad but determined voice as it came from his radio loud-speaker:

"I am speaking to you from the Cabinet Room at 10, Downing Street. . . . This country is at war with Germany. . . . I know you will all play your parts with calmness and courage. . . . Now, may God bless you all. May He defend the right. It is evil things that we shall be fighting against—brute force, bad faith, injustice, oppression and persecution—and against them I am certain that the right will prevail."

With a sigh, Winston flicked off the set as Chamberlain finished. The time for talking was past. The time for

action had come. For the second time in his sixty-five years he was to be plunged into a decisive role in the conduct of a war against Germany, a war for the life of Britain, of Democracy, of Freedom.

Hurrying across to the Commons, he listened to the formal announcement that the war had begun, rose with a typically generous tribute to the men who had fought so long and so arduously for the peace that had just died.

"In this solemn hour," said he, "it is a consolation to recall and to dwell upon our repeated efforts for peace. All have been ill-starred, but all have been faithful and sincere. . . . Outside, the storms of war may blow and the land may be lashed with the fury of the gales, but in our hearts, this Sunday morning, there is peace. Our hands may be active, but our consciences are at rest.

"There is a feeling of thankfulness that, if these trials were to come upon our island, there is a generation of Britons here now, ready to prove that it is not unworthy of the days of yore, not unworthy of those great men, the fathers of our land.

"This is no question of fighting for Danzig or fighting for Poland. We are fighting to save the world from the pestilence of Nazi tyranny and in defence of all that is most sacred to man. This is no war for domination and Imperial aggrandizement, for material gain. It is a war pure in its inherent quality, a war to establish on impregnable rocks the rights of the individual, and it is a war to establish and revive the stature of man!"

How truly he reflected—as he almost always did in his public speeches—the feelings of the man and woman in the street. That was precisely how most went into the second World War: not eagerly, but with grim determination. Not blindly, but with eyes wide open to the dangers and perils of the course to be followed. Not with song-singing, Mafficking and stimulated patriotism, but with quiet pride in their race, a determination not to let down "the fathers of our land."

And Churchill, as so often before, was prepared to trust the people, to leave to their sure instinct the conduct of their essential part in the war. And, as so often before



he was right to do so. The nation was united as never before in a supreme crisis.

Within an hour of his appointment to the Admiralty that afternoon, Churchill took over, and spent most of the night in the First Lord's room or in the underground War Room, with its secret charts and maps. Swiftly but methodically, he gathered up the familiar reins which guide the Royal Navy.

I wonder if he thought of those words of General Sir Bindon Blood's, in his mention in dispatches from India many years before of one Lieutenant W. L. S. Churchill : "He made himself useful at a critical moment" ?

## CHAPTER THE SECOND

### BACK TO THE NAVY

Up at the top of the big Admiralty building, in Whitehall, there are some rooms designed by a lavish builder for the servants of the First Lord. They are small, with small windows, but they look out over the Government offices around, and out on to the flagstaff from which the Admiralty's anchor-decorated flag never ceases to fly, day or night, on to the broad expanse of the Horse Guards' Parade, and down on to the activity of Whitehall.

It was in this eyrie that Winston Churchill chose to live when he went to the Admiralty, preferring it to the elaborate and rambling "official residence" the builders of more spacious and less servant-starved days had allocated to the political head of the Royal Navy. And into that flat he crammed (as one disgruntled Civil Servant put it) all the telephones and gadgets in Creation. His invariable order was that, if anything important happened, day or night, late or early, he was to be told at once. Many a time, officials and Naval officers were startled to see a figure in a dressing-gown and slippers, his striped pyjama trousers flapping as he walked, striding, cigar in mouth, into the War Room.

"Tell me, tell me, tell me !" was his insistent demand,

and he soon had the position of every ship, the possibilities of every dock, shipyard and store in his head.

He had not long to wait for action.

Calling—successfully—for the maps and charts on which he had kept track of the ships of the Fleet in the first World War, Winston prepared to resume his minute interest in the doings of the King's Navee. On the very night of the declaration of war, the Germans sank the liner *Athenia*, with 1,400 passengers on board, 200 miles west of the Hebrides. The ship was torpedoed without warning, and, luckily, most of the passengers and crew were saved.

There were 511 Americans on board, and the Germans, probably alarmed by this fact, at once announced that the sinking was the work of—Mr. Churchill! The world laughed.

Something that was certainly largely the work of Mr. Churchill was a daring raid by the Royal Air Force on Wilhelmshaven and Brunsbüttel, at the entrance to the Kiel Canal. Vessels of the German Fleet, including two battleships, were heavily bombed.

The realism of the First Lord was seen by many in an official statement issued by the Government on September 10, giving a cold douche to the "Short-war enthusiasts" by announcing that every preparation was being made on the assumption that the war would last three years or more. I remember what a shock that was to the country—three years seemed at that stage like Eternity! But it was a useful steadier, and the country settled down, with quiet resolution, to a long war.

Hitler's U-boats, which had been sent to their war-stations long before the war began, began to take their toll of Allied shipping, and there was rarely a day without some losses.

But Churchill, who played so decisive a part in bringing us victory then, had not forgotten the lessons of the last war. Within a couple of days of the war beginning, the convoy system which had saved many ships in 1914-18 was in full operation. And in a few days more, a number of U-boats began to fall victims to our aggressive defence.

The immediate reply of the Germans was to sow "magnetic" mines in all the main sea-routes. I will remember the consternation caused in the secret places of Whitehall when the first of these devilish instruments was discovered. It was a depressing time, with ships going down at the rate of many a week. First problem was to find out *what* the mines were, then *how they worked*, then *how to counteract* or defeat them.

Some day the full story will be told, how all these problems were met and solved. Luck played some part, for a mine, complete, was washed up on a certain part of the British coast. Admiralty high-ups and great scientists went that night to the spot, and began their perilous work right away. It was a nerve-racking job, taking the mine to pieces, because none knew which of the knobs and projections was the one that set the whole thing off—and perhaps shattered the nearby town, into the bargain! Several "mystery" decorations went to sweating men who took part in that dangerous work, and the official citations could give their winners no public indication of the hard way they had gained them.

But, at last, the job was done, and a magnetic mine lay in pieces on the benches of the scientists. Churchill has always been a believer in the maxim that every now engine of war has its antidote, and it took a comparatively short time to work out a system which would make steel ships non-magnetic. So "de-gaussing" went into the wartime dictionary—and the peril of the magnetic mine was ended. If that mine had not been washed up whole, and if the experts had not survived the perils of taking it to pieces, and if we had not been able to find means of de-magnetizing steel ships . . . this war might have taken a very different course.

While the scientists worked in their laboratories, the First Lord ordered the intensification of the war on the U-boats. "The Royal Navy," said he, "is hunting them day and night—I will not say without mercy, because God forbid that we should ever part company with that, but at any rate with zeal and not altogether without relish!"

A few days later, Winston was able to announce that,

in the first two weeks of the war, a tenth of Germany's submarines were destroyed. And our shipping losses were falling.

On the evening of Sunday, October 1, Winston made one of those broadcasts which were to become such a feature of the war's progress, and were, in time of stress, to play so decisive a part in maintaining the nation's morale and spirits.

Hitler, he said, had decided when the war was to begin, but it was not for him, or his successors, to say when it would end. "It began when *he* wanted it, and it will end only when *we* are convinced that he has had enough!"

Against success in sinking U-boats had to be set the disaster—he never pretended it was anything less—of the loss of the *Royal Oak*. A daring U-boat wormed its way into Scapa Flow harbour and blew up the great warship as it lay at anchor. The news shocked the nation, and a secret court of inquiry sat at once. A week or two later, the First Lord was able to announce the findings, which were that none of the precautionary measures were at the strength or efficiency they should have been. "The Admiralty has learned the lesson that nothing must be taken for granted!" said he.

From that moment, nothing *was* taken for granted.

And so it went on, this grim balance sheet, with profit and loss filling in as the war—the "phoney" war as they called it then!—went on. The armed merchantman *Rawalpindi*—a former P. and O. liner—went to the bottom in a blaze of deathless glory, the victim of the guns of the German pocket-battleship *Deutschland*. Three thousand little ships were convoyed with the loss of only seven. And more and more age-groups were called up for military service.

While the wise-ones sneered about the "phoney" war, and there were even hints that the "whole thing had been arranged behind the scenes" and that "there would be no real fighting at all," Churchill got on with his plans to fight the naval war. By the fourteenth week of the war, 1,000 of our merchant ships had been armed for self-

defence. For every 1,000 tons of shipping lost to the U-boats, 250,000 tons got safe home.

But there was nothing in those early days to equal, for sheer dramatic thrill, the episode of the German pocket-battleship *Admiral Graf Spee*. This raider, found on its unlawful business by British warships, was chased ignominiously into the neutral harbour of Monte Video. The 6-inch cruiser *Ajax* made the first contact with the German ship, defying its 11-inch guns, and then *Exeter*, with 8-inch guns, and *Achilles*, with 6-inch guns, arrived on the scene. *Exeter* was so badly hit that she had to drop out of the fight, but the other two kept up the battle right through the day, and until the moment the "Pride of the German Navy" fled into the sanctuary of the Uruguayan harbour. By then, there were gaping holes in her sides, and the control tower was smashed.

Under international law, a belligerent warship is not allowed to stay in a neutral harbour for more than a limited time, and the Uruguayan Government promptly informed the captain of the *Spee* that he must move out within seventy-two hours. The crew worked feverishly, patching up the vessel—while the British warships waited like cats at a mousehole, just outside territorial waters.

In his room at the Admiralty, Winston was dictating a steady flow of orders. Reinforcements sped to the waiting "cats," ships with much heavier guns, much longer range. They waited.

On Sunday, December 7, 1939, as the war's sixteenth week opened, the *Spee* obeyed the eviction order, and steamed slowly out of Monte Video harbour. The British ships closed in for the kill. Quietly they placed themselves in position to destroy this proud representative of the German Navy, and then—the *Spee* sank, five miles from the neutral shore, scuttled by its own crew. Faced with the choice between internment and scuttling, the captain—it was later revealed on Hitler's direct orders—had sent his vessel to the bottom. And then he shot himself.

It was a crazy, a bizarre business. Hundreds of thousands of people watched the drama, like some stage spectacle, from vantage points on shore. And the news flashed

round the world. In the Admiralty, Churchill excitedly, but with satisfaction, took off his maps the emblem representing the raider *Spee*.

Ominous rumblings came from Holland and Belgium. Mobilization orders were given to the tiny armies, and the German Government complained that a Netherlands airplane had "violated" German territory. The rumblings died down. But leave from the British Expeditionary Force in France—it had been got across without the loss of a single life—was stopped.

I was in Paris in the middle of February, 1940, when, on a brilliantly sunny Sunday morning, I detected great excitement, particularly when my friends and I spoke English. In fact, our walk to the Gare du Nord became something of a triumphal progress. Puzzled, we bought newspapers—and then the reason for the excitement became plain. This was the story we read, for the first time :

A couple of British destroyers, patrolling, had come across the German prison ship *Altmark*, carrying between 300 and 400 members of the crews of merchantmen sunk in the South Atlantic by the *Graf Spee*. The *Altmark* was moving down the Norwegian coast, hugging the shore. Scenting danger, perhaps, the captain steered the ship into a fiord. Darkness fell. The British destroyer *Cossack* slipped silently into the fiord. . . .

Suddenly, with a cry of "The Navy's here !" a strong boarding party from the destroyer jumped on the German ship, and, in a short time, rescued all the British prisoners, who had been battened down below hatches—299 of them.

True, the rescue took place inside Norwegian territorial waters, but nobody—least of all the Norwegians, who formally protested, as good neutrals should—could withhold cheers for as gallant a piece of naval daring as any in our crowded annals. There were a few lukewarm exchanges between the British and Norwegian Foreign Offices, and the Germans, of course, tried to make mischief, but, in a day or two, the diplomatic furore had died down, leaving only the glorious page in naval history—and that

phrase: "The Navy's here!" which Mr. Churchill described as taking a place alongside Nelson's Trafalgar message.

That same week, I went into a part of the Maginot Line. It was an amazing experience, for the forts are astonishing and impressive places—for those who believe in static warfare. Everything that could possibly be needed, from water to wine, from crockery to shells, was stored there, deep in the sides of the hills. Outside, the acres and acres of tank-traps—great steel and concrete posts the troops laughingly called "asparagus"—were meant to guard the approaches. In the forests, vast piles of shells stood stacked. In every copse a siege gun.

And the men? When I got back from that visit, everybody asked me the same question: "What will France do in the war?" My reply was always the same: "If she can throw off the Maginot Line complex, she will do great things. If not . . ."

Over in a remote part of Alsace, I met a tall, handsome, imperious Colonel of the French Army, who ruled a tank school with a rod of highly polished steel, but who evidently got results. He turned out for my inspection a squadron or two of tanks and made them "do their stuff," proudly watching as they tore up and down impossible-looking slopes, in and out of great pits in the rough ground.

Looking almost dreamily at the prancing monsters, the Colonel murmured: "Give me a hundred thousand tanks—and I'll breach the Siegfried Line, or anything else!"

I remember how we laughed. A hundred thousand tanks, indeed!

And I remember how the Colonel shrugged his shoulders in half-comical resignation. His name was Charles de Gaulle, and, as they told us, ironically, in Paris, he dreamed tanks.

But, later on, he was to show that he did more than dream.

The "phoney" war dragged on, with an occasional air-raid to enliven some outlying part of the British Isles,

periodical reports that another ship had gone down, victim of a U-boat.

Suddenly, Germany invaded Norway and Denmark, swooping with overwhelming force, and explaining that the action had had to be taken to forestall the Allies, who had intended to seize the two small countries! The Germans did not act without loss. Churchill ordered a strong British Fleet into action, and, amid the perils of the narrow waters, they took heavy toll of the German forces as they dashed for Norway. Our submarines did great damage to the transports; the Germans lost half the cruisers of their fleet. But the Germans got too firm a foothold, and the British Expeditionary Force, hastily dispatched to the rescue of the Norwegians, never had a chance. For one thing, they had no landing grounds on which to land their planes. A certain Major Quisling, a Norwegian, whose name was to go down in the black annals of treachery, had seen to that, to be rewarded with precarious office under the German conquerors.

It was one of the most exciting periods of the war, with rumour running mad. Sitting in the Savoy Hotel one evening, I watched a group of famous actors and actresses almost falling over each other to hear the news from a portable radio-set and relaying it—it now seems clear, with imaginative additions!—to the silent but excited diners. The British had sunk the whole German Fleet, sent to the bottom a score of heavily loaded transports, had landed strong forces on the shores of Norway and Denmark . . . But the stories were not true. In a short time, the British had to withdraw from Norway.

But those who could go behind the scenes were even more worried about ominous rumblings from just across the Channel—from France. M. Daladier resigned, to be succeeded as Premier by M. Paul Reynaud, a dark, handsome man, who had been Finance Minister, and who was regarded as one of France's "strong men." But it was the general attitude of listlessness, lack of interest in the war, shown from top to bottom of the French Governmental machine, that so deeply worried the British Government. Ministers' minds must have gone back to that fateful



Saturday afternoon of September 2, when ill-tempered critics had complained of delay—and only the inner circle knew why the delay had occurred. France was reluctant. And France was reluctant still. But that was a secret.

The fighting in Norway, centring in Trondheim, pursued its course. But the odds were hopeless, and the result a foregone conclusion.

As suddenly, almost as unexpectedly, as the German invasion, political crisis burst on Britain. When the news of the Norway setback was made known, there was an immediate demand for a two days' debate in the House of Commons. It was a critical, bitter and angry debate, with Members alleging that the Norway campaign had been bungled, that vision had been lacking in its handling.

Winston Churchill wound up the debate on the second day, in a House crammed and excited, amid the hostile shouts and cheers of the Labour Party, and the uneasy silence of many Conservatives. It was a grave but strongly fighting speech, in which the First Lord boldly and gallantly took full responsibility for everything done at the Admiralty.

"I hope you will not allow yourself to be converted into an air-raid shelter to keep the splinters from hitting your colleagues!" cried Lloyd George. It was clearly useless to argue in the existing atmosphere of the House and the division was taken.

But before Members trooped into the division lobbies, Churchill did manage to give one warning which, in the light of the events to follow so soon afterwards, must be regarded as a remarkable piece of foresight:

*"We must be careful not to exhaust our Air Force, in view of other grave dangers which might open upon us at any time."*

But, angry and excited, the House went to the division. Result: For the Government 281; against 200. A great many M.P.s, including 40 normal supporters of the Government, abstained, and Mr. Neville Chamberlain went from the Chamber that night knowing that his Government's life was at an end.

## CHAPTER THE THIRD

## PRIME MINISTER

WHILE Mr. Chamberlain tried, in vain, to reconstruct his Ministry, the Nazis struck again, this time in Holland and Belgium. First they lulled the fears of the two small Powers, inducing them to refuse military aid from the great Allies, then, in the period of "twilight sleep," as one British Minister called it, the invasion was launched. Little Luxembourg was over-run, too. It was hopeless, from the start, to prevent the invasion, but swift counter-action was taken by the British Expeditionary Force in France. Within a few hours, it was on the move to the aid of the stricken Belgians.

At this crisis, the leaders of the Labour Party met their Executive Committee at Bournemouth and decided that there must be an immediate change of Government if they were to co-operate in winning the war, or averting defeat.

Neville Chamberlain at once resigned, and King George sent, within a few minutes, for Winston Churchill, who was asked to form a Government.

What irony of fate, that a life's ambition should have been achieved in such a setting! The slow, hard-working plodding of years, through high and low office, through periods in the political wilderness, had led, at last, to the highest political office in the land—but all around the clouds were black. And the secret papers in his steel-lined Cabinet box told Winston plainly that worse—much, much worse—was to come.

He accepted the King's Commission with a simple: "If it is your wish, Sir!" He set at once about the formidable task of forming an all-Party Government.

It was, in some respects, a simple task; in others, a supremely difficult one. Men of all Parties were ready to join the Administration, but the difficulty was to select those who could perform the difficult tasks of wartime

Government and, at the same time, command wide public approval and assent.

But the Government was formed. So speedily did Mr. Churchill work that some of the outgoing Ministers heard of their fate first through the newspapers or on the radio. One, who had been out of touch, knew of his displacement only when his successor walked into his Ministry and took possession ; another heard of his appointment while taking a Turkish bath. For the inner circle of Ministers knew that the clouds were even blacker than they seemed to the uninitiated. They knew that sore trials, the most severe test of Britain's steadfastness of purpose, lay immediately ahead. A great deal—everything—might depend on the saving of a few moments, the avoidance of any sort of hiatus in the work of the vital Government Departments. "It was necessary," said Mr. Churchill, "that the Government should be formed in a single day, on account of the extreme urgency and rigour of events."

In the speech with which he commended his new Government to Parliament, Winston gracefully apologized to all concerned for "any lack of ceremony with which it had been necessary to act."

Then came that famous phrase, which has long since taken its place among the great sayings of our political history :

"I would say to this House, as I said to those who joined the Government : 'I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat.' " It was the supreme test of the Prime Minister's set policy of trusting the people of Britain to rise to any task, to meet any demand. But it was a severe test, and faces were grim as they listened to his further words :

"We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many long months of struggle and of suffering.

"You ask : what is our *policy* ? I will say : It is to wage war, by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us ; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime. That—that is our policy.

"You ask, what is our *aim*? I can answer in one word: It is *victory*! Victory at all costs. Victory in spite of all terror. Victory, however long and hard the road may be. For without victory, there is no survival. Let that be realized; no survival for the British Empire, no survival for all that the British Empire has stood for, no survival for the urge and impulse of the ages, that mankind will move forward towards its goal.

"But I take up my task with buoyancy and hope. I feel sure that our cause will not be suffered to fail among men. At this time I feel entitled to claim the aid of all, and I say: 'Come, then, let us go forward with our united strength!'"

Many on the Floor and in the galleries were in tears—but they were tears of resolve, one might almost say of dedication. The nation was united again.

A week after his appointment as Prime Minister, he was at the microphone again, with another "pep-talk" to the people of Britain—a talk that was eagerly heard by people far outside the British Isles, for, by now, the whole world was beginning to take interest in the plight of the centre of the British Empire.

"After the battle of France will come the battle of our island—for all that Britain is, for all that Britain means. This is one of the most awe-striking periods of the long history of France and Britain. It is also, beyond doubt, the most sublime."

Those were grim days, and yet, as one looks back on them, they were indeed proud and thrilling days too. What, we wondered, had been the meaning of that phrase the Premier had used in his speech in the House: "We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind"? Was it rhetoric—or had he something more specific in mind?

We had not long to wait for the reply.

In a week, Churchill announced, first the fall of Abbeville, and the penetration of the Germans behind the Allied lines, then the capitulation of the King of the Belgians. "But," he added, "the House should prepare for hard and heavy tidings!"

So there was more to come !

From behind the scenes, those of us who were able to do so watched, for the next week or two, as great and tense a drama as any in the modern history of our land. From the public at large, the full magnitude of the drama was hidden, although it was generally known that the British Expeditionary Force was in mortal peril as the triumphant German armies swept on from victory to victory. With the Belgians out of the battle—later revelations were to go far to justify the course they had taken, but it was, to Britain, a bitter blow at the time—and the French cut off from aiding us, things looked desperate indeed, even to the eye that could not see the whole scene.

It was secretly debated whether the public should be told all, or whether it was not better to withhold the worst for a time. Events were galloping on. Disaster followed disaster. The crisis grew and grew. The strain on those who knew all became more and more intense. This was blood, and toil, and tears and sweat, indeed.

And then the miracle happened. The Miracle of Dunkirk.

From the moment that the French forces broke at Sedan and on the Meuse in the second week in May, only swift movement, retreat, could have saved the situation for the British Expeditionary Force. The French tried hard to help, but were unable to do so. And if we had withdrawn fast, to save our skins, the Belgian Army would have been shattered, exposed to the full fury of the concentrated German assault. The German armour moved swiftly.

Sweeping like a sharp scythe, it cut into the British Army, severing it from its Allies. Communications were cut by eight or nine strong German armoured divisions. And the cutting of communications meant that food and ammunition supplies were cut off.

French and British fought side by side in defence of Calais and Boulogne, spurning surrender demands and fighting on until the sudden deadly silence told the story of defeat by overwhelming opposition. Some day, the full

story of those heroic battles will be told. They were not so many Charges of the Light Brigade. They meant life or death to the main forces, cut off up Dunkirk way, fighting for time—time to make a get-away. The sacrifice of the men who fought for Calais and Boulogne meant life to the men on Dunkirk's beaches. But, slowly and relentlessly, the Germans were almost surrounding the British, French and Belgian armies. Desperately the Allied forces fought to save their only line of retreat: Dunkirk and its beaches. From the land and from the air, the trapped armies were pounded.

The Cabinet was in almost constant session throughout those anxious, dark days. To Mr. Churchill and his colleagues it was reported: "Perhaps 20,000 to 30,000 men may be re-embarked, brought safely home. As for the rest . . ."

That was what Winston had meant when he prudently warned the House and the country—and, by this time, the whole civilized world—to expect "hard and heavy tidings." All that mattered in the British Army, the whole core of the armies that were planned for the victorious campaigns to come, was in peril—terrible, searing peril—of death or capture.

And they had with them everything that had been built and forged and made by the sweating workers in our munition factories, all the guns and tanks and lorries, all the shells, the small arms ammunition, the hundred-and-one supplies that go to make a modern army.

But those could be made again—somehow. The order went forth to save the men, that not a single rifle nor a hundred tanks should be saved if it meant that one man had to be sacrificed. "Save the *men*, save the *men*!" was the insistent cry.

Triumphantly the Germans increased their air forces, rained bombs on the beaches of Dunkirk, put down a concentrated barrage on the shifting sands which were the way of life or death to our men. Magnetic mines were sowed thickly in the channels and the open sea leading to the beaches. Waves of German planes each a hundred strong kept up the rain of death, in endless, merciless

relays. U-boats arrived in droves, seeking to terrorize the ships that might try to take the men off the beaches of hope and death. German motor-launches joined in the hunt. And all the time, the German infantry and armour pressed and pressed, squeezing the tiny pocket of resistance held by the stubborn British troops, aided only by a few Frenchmen, fewer Belgians. For four or five days, the struggle raged, ceaselessly, day and night. Tighter and tighter grew the ring around the desperately resisting forces.

I remember being in Whitehall when the Miracle of Dunkirk occurred. Mild little men, bespectacled and bent with much leaning over Civil Service desks, took their neat little hats off methodical little pegs, donned them at precise angles, went from their offices as they had gone every evening for years. The English week-end is something sacred, not to be upset.

But many of those quiet little men had that week-end sterner work than the cultivation of their gardens. They went, not a few of them, to the stricken beaches of Dunkirk, through the hail of fire, into the jaws of death, to the aid of those men of the British Army on whose behalf the cry had gone, in formal minutes and urgent personal appeal, around Whitehall's staid offices: "Save the *men* ; save the *men* !"

One man from a Government office a few yards from 10, Downing Street dashed to the coast, took over to Dunkirk—over seas then miraculously calm—a feather-light canoe, in which, thrice, he brought back one single man at a time. Then, exhausted, he went back to his office in Whitehall, and nobody heard of his exploit until it came out, accidentally, weeks later.

In dinghies, little boats and big ones, in motor-boats and rowing boats, and pleasure steamers and merchant ships, and warships and lifeboats, men strained and struggled to the rescue. Two hundred and twenty light warships were engaged in that strange errand ; 650 other vessels joined in. Sometimes the weather was cruel, sometimes kind. Always, in light or darkness, the enemy kept up the merciless hail of fire, the deluge of bombs. Enemy



IN THE CABINET ROOM AT "No 10" WITH EMPIRE PREMIERS  
Field Marshal Smuts, Mr Mackenzie King, Mr John Curtin, and Mr Peter Fraser





10. Downing Street.

Plan for 1981 in 1980

Q. Q. Q. or in in.

The first frost of the season has been  
the. The water in the reservoirs has  
already been frozen. The water in the  
for the winter.

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# RISING AND FALLING PIERS

The seed of the "Mulberry." A facsimile of Churchill's note that led to the creation of the famous "prefabricated port."



### IN THE BLITZ

"You're great people!" he told the sweating A R P workers  
shouted back

"You're O K yourself!" they



'All damned nonsense!' said he. The only picture ever taken of Churchill in an air raid shelter

torpedoes tore through the waters, mines blew many a gallant ship sky-high.

Back and forth, back and forth, went the little ships, carrying the Men of Dunkirk to their native shores. Back and forth like a restless loom weaving an immortal piece of the tapestry that is Britain's history. Hospital ships were bombed without mercy, but the men and women on board never faltered. Anyone who could propel a boat or a ship joined in—schoolboys, shamelessly lying about their ages to the anxious officials; old men who might be their grandfathers; even, it was said, women who donned men's clothes for the occasion. Slowly and painfully, the men were brought home, the scores mounted to hundreds, the hundreds to thousands, the thousands to tens of thousands.

In Downing Street, Churchill ordered a desperate step: that part of the main metropolitan fighter strength of the R.A.F. should be sent to the risky job of attacking the German bombers that were shattering the beaches of Dunkirk. The gamble succeeded. Our fighters "clawed the German bombers and their protecting fighters out of the sky," as a man who was there told me. It was the turning of the tide. The tens of thousands of rescued became hundreds of thousands.

Thus was the Miracle of Dunkirk achieved. Many a mild-mannered clerk or shop-assistant, not a few "gentlemen of leisure," failed to return from those fatal beaches; but they had done their part in carrying out that stirring order: "Save the *men*!"

"A miracle of deliverance," Winston called it, "achieved by valour, by perseverance, by perfect discipline, by faultless service, by resource, by skill, by unconquerable fidelity."

None of those who died in that week-end, that others might live, could have a more noble epitaph.

Altogether more than 335,000 men, French and British, were carried to our shores from those beaches of Hell—more than ten times the most optimistic estimate made a few days earlier.

Half-naked, hungry, soaked in thick oil, unarmed,

wounded, half-dead, dizzy with fatigue, the men were poured out on the beaches of Britain, and their rescuers, in much the same plight, hurried back for more. But at last it was plain that no more could be rescued, and the nightmare fleet ended its task.

That night, when the total of the rescued was laid before him, the Prime Minister sat looking at it for a long time, tears in his eyes. The little ships had saved the men—and that was all that mattered. Many a soldier's home rejoiced that night that might have mourned. And many a home mourned a man whose normal path of duty lay in the quiet of an office in Whitehall, a village shop or garage, the library of a great country house, even the dressing-room of a theatre. But the "miracle of deliverance" was complete. Britain had added another chapter to her Book of Fame.

The men of Dunkirk were saved. But their equipment and war material were lost, left on those beaches, on the roads, on the battlefields. It was a bitter blow, for all the energies and enthusiasm of thousands of workers had gone to the creation of that pool of arms and equipment, and replacements would not be easy—even given time.

But *should* we be given time? Would Hitler, having hurled us, disarmed and defeated, from the shores of the Continent, wait for us to recover? Or would he follow up his advantage, and attack Britain, right away?

"After the battle of France will come the battle of our island," Churchill had said.

The list of losses of material was laid before the Cabinet. Nearly 1,000 guns. All the transport—thousands of lorries, complicated motor vehicles of all kinds so essential to the life of a twentieth century army. All the armoured vehicles. All the stores. All the ammunition. All the weapons—except the few to which men, near to death by drowning off those satanic beaches, had clung as though their lives depended on them. All the tanks.

Then the list of What Was Left, the tally of the war stores that remained. It was a frightening list, for all that we had had gone into the equipment of that B.E.F. of ours. It had the cream of the men, and more than the

cream of our available supplies and equipment. "A very well and finely equipped army," as the Premier described it.

Clearly the disaster-triumph of Dunkirk meant that we had to start all over again in building up the great—and "finely equipped"—armies which were later, according to our long-range plans, to attack and overwhelm the German Wehrmacht.

Looking at those two lists—of what had gone, an enormous catalogue; of what remained, a pitifully tiny one—Winston made swift decisions, called in the Ministers whose special job it would be to repair the damage.

"We must build up again," he said. "We must make an effort the like of which has never been seen in our records. This time, it is life or death for Britain, for the British Commonwealth, for humanity!"

Even the Ministers who occasionally complained that Churchill treated them individually as a public meeting and "orated" at them, did not complain about his dramatic words. They hurried off, called meetings which went on all night, made their plans, set them into operation. Within a matter of hours, Britain was at work on its efforts to rebuild the losses of Dunkirk. Factories and shipyards hummed with redoubled activity; managements and workers threw aside all thought of rest. Sundays and weekdays, dark and light, were all the same to the eager workers; the job must go on.

In a few hours, Mr. Churchill was able to tell the House of Commons: "Capital and labour have cast aside their interests, rights and customs, and put them into the common stock. Already the flow of munitions has leapt forward."

So deep was the thankfulness of the nation that the Miracle of Dunkirk had delivered so many of our men from the jaws of death that many were inclined to regard the whole thing as a military triumph. So, in many ways, it was. But, with the frankness he always employed when the nation faced a direful situation, the Premier told the House of Commons that what had happened was a "colossal military disaster." The Channel ports had gone into the hands of the enemy. The strong points on which

we had relied had gone. Our armies, and those of the French, were split and broken. "We must expect another blow immediately!"

A crowded House of Commons listened breathlessly to the account of Dunkirk given by the Prime Minister, and men looked significantly at each other as he said:

"We are told that Herr Hitler has plans for invading the British Isles. This has often been thought of before. When Napoleon lay at Boulogne for a year with his flat-bottomed boats and his Grand Army, he was told by someone: 'There are bitter weeds in England.' There are certainly a great many more of them since the British Expeditionary Force returned!"

Striking the table with his clenched fist, he went on like this:

"I have myself full confidence that if we all do our duty, if nothing is neglected, and if the best arrangements are made, as they are being made, we shall prove ourselves once again able to defend our island home, to ride the storm of war, and to outlive the menace of tyranny, if necessary for years, if necessary alone."

If necessary alone? *Alone*? Could it be that France . . . ?

Looking back, it seems to me that that week was possibly the grimmest of all the grim weeks of the war. There was an atmosphere of foreboding which even determined optimism could not quite dispel from the minds of those whose work gave them a deeper insight into secret affairs than was possible for the man in the street.

Gripping the edge of the dispatch box on the table of the House of Commons until his knuckles showed white, Churchill uttered another of his now world-famous calls:

"We shall not flag or fail; we shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans. We shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air. We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing-grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills. We shall *never* surrender. Even if, which I do not for a moment believe, this island or a large part of it were subjugated

and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle until, in God's good time, the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the Old."

That was stark enough, in all conscience.

But, even in the midst of this crisis—and Churchill knew better than any how great it was—his wit and good humour welled up. As he sat down, after this great oration, which had deeply moved the House and all in the crowded galleries, he said something which only those sitting close to him could hear.

A ripple of laughter, rather grim in its tones, ran along the Treasury Bench. What had Winston said? I can tell you.

"We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight . . ." It was a stirring, an historic call. And what he added, in low tones, was this typically Churchillian phrase:

"I don't know what we shall do it with—choppers, I suppose!"

#### CHAPTER THE FOURTH

### THE TRAGEDY OF FRANCE

FRANCE was struggling for life. Her armies were broken up and in disorder. The men and women, the children and the domestic animals that had populated her towns and villages were in panic, cluttering up the roads, getting in the way of the military traffic, creating an atmosphere that could spell only disaster.

Even Paris was in peril from the strutting armies of Der Fuehrer. Reynaud's Cabinet was split and bickering, disunited and distrusting.

It happens that I had personal experience of the strange, fateful, fatal atmosphere of that divided Cabinet, for I had had an encounter with many of its Ministers. A few weeks earlier, just before the military disasters fell upon France, I was, with Vernon Bartlett, of the *News-Chronicle*, Wilson Broadbent, of the *Daily Mail*, "Trilby" Ewer, of



the *Daily Herald*, and Iverach Macdonald, of *The Times*, the guest of the French Government at luncheon at the Admiralty in Paris. It was a strange meal. The food was excellent ; the atmosphere it was that was so strange. My colleagues and I were the guests of honour, the luncheon was given for us and a number of Ministers were summoned to meet us.

We noticed a strained atmosphere as we assembled in the graceful, tapestried, old-fashioned reception room. The Minister of Marine and his charming wife seemed pre-occupied. They fluttered around the room graciously enough, but giving the guests of honour very little attention.

Then we went in to luncheon, into the magnificent room where a long oval table was laid for the party of a score or so. The host and hostess carefully ushered us to our places, clearly embarrassed. We wondered why. Then we found that they were placing the Ministers—the vivacious Reynaud, the ill-fated Mandel, my immediate and extraordinarily taciturn neighbour, among them—in the places of honour. We merely filled in the places that were left. The meal went on in the same atmosphere of strained formality, with each Minister watching the rest narrowly, scarcely talking at all to the guests of honour !

And I vividly recall that, in response to our half-amused, half-annoyed comments later, an official explained with a resigned and embarrassed shrug that it was impossible to arrange the table otherwise, so great was the jealousy between Ministers !

"Besides," he added with a nervous little laugh, "we have to place them where they can keep an eye on each other !"

I remember that we were all greatly perturbed by the events of that revealing couple of hours of anything but social intercourse. It was plain, from many other indications, that there was serious trouble on the political side in France, and that any added strain would test the whole structure.

After Dunkirk, defeatism won many converts in France's

high places. "What's the use of going on?" was the slogan. The Germans, with the wily Dr. Josef Goebbels in charge of their propaganda, first whispered, then shouted, that Britain was willing—nay, eager—to fight to the last Frenchman. The calumny found many eager believers. The process of political breakdown, once started, is difficult to arrest, and there appears to have been little effort by many of the most important Ministers to essay the task.

The situation was getting more and more serious, the political breakdown more and more complete. Churchill suddenly decided to go to France in the hope that some of the spirit of his "We shall never surrender" proclamation might be imparted to the wavering French.

He flew over to Paris, had a meeting with Reynaud, who was pessimistic about his ability to hold his Ministers and the people, but resolute that they ought to continue the fight. It was in some ways an inspiring meeting, for it was good to know that there was one strong man, at least, in high office. But the general effect was depressing, for Churchill, with his quick political perception, could see that drastic steps were necessary if France were to be prevented from falling out of the war.

And who could take those steps? Certainly, Britain was in no position to do so, with her army all but disarmed, with the threat of invasion hanging over her. But at least we had political unity, on a scale probably never equalled in our history. At least we had every man, woman and child in the land pulling the same way—for triumph over difficulties and eventual victory.

At Churchill's request, a meeting of the Supreme War Council was held in Paris a week later. The position had grown even more desperate. The Premier took with him Mr. Attlee, Sir John Dill, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Sir Hastings Ismay, his military chief at the Ministry of Defence, and General Spears, in a final effort to stiffen the French Government. The French Ministers present—it makes strange reading in the light of subsequent events—included the aged Marshal Petain and Admiral Darlan. Reynaud was there, too.

But everybody in the inner circles knew that the end was nearing, that the Germans would find the French split and defeatist when they made their final drive. Churchill discovered, with a shock, that the French Army had no strategic reserve. If one were to be built up—as it must be—the men and weapons would have to be taken from different parts of the already perilously thin line of defence.

Forward the German forces plunged on to Paris. Then, standing before a shrieking crowd which had gathered in front of his Palazzo Venezia, Mussolini declared that his country was at war with France.

Struggling against impossible pressure from the front, France was stabbed in the back. Mussolini was running true to form.

Reynaud that night broadcast a statement strangely reminiscent of Winston's "We-shall-fight-on-the-beaches" speech: "We shall fight before Paris, fight behind Paris, shut ourselves up in one of our provinces, and, if they drive us out, go to North Africa and then to one of our American possessions."

In the hour of need, Mr. Churchill pledged everything Britain could offer on land, sea and air. Fresh British forces were sent to France. The R.A.F. worked ceaselessly. Reinforcements were organized in the midst of the chaos Dunkirk had wrought.

But, within a short time, the French Government and the foreign diplomats left Paris for the provinces, and Paris was declared an open town. The Reynaud Government paused in the ancient town of Tours, sent yet another S O S to Churchill.

By now, the situation was at crisis. It was clear that France was in mortal peril. In that hour, Churchill made his decision to go once more to France in a final attempt to breathe his spirit of defiance into the weak body of France.

Flying weather was bad and the Air Staff, mindful of the dangers, pressed strongly that the idea of the flight to Tours should be abandoned.

This was Churchill's reply: "To hell with that—I'm

going, whatever happens! This is too serious a situation to bother about *the weather*."

Anxious about what they considered the Premier's rashness, the air chiefs went to Neville Chamberlain—whose own flying trips in search of peace had been made in bad weather—and pleaded with him to dissuade Churchill. Chamberlain consulted Mrs. Churchill, suggested that she should use her influence with her husband, to get him to drop the plan.

Mrs. Churchill listened to the plea, and then, with tears in her eyes, replied: "Lots of young men are at this moment risking their lives for the cause. Winston will do his duty, whatever happens. It is not for me to try to over-persuade him."

"You are quite right," replied Chamberlain, gravely. "There is nothing more to be said."

As they spoke, Churchill was upstairs supervising the packing of his bags. To his valet, he said, with a grim smile: "Give me my heavy pistol—and load it! If anything happens, and I fall into the hands of the Huns, I want to account for at least one, before they get me!"

The pistol was loaded, and Churchill carried it with him throughout that fateful journey. The aeroplane wobbled crazily as it took off, and the officers who saw it returned sadly to their work. Many of them thought they had seen the last of "The P.M."

But, after what he later admitted to have been a nightmare flight, Churchill reached Tours. There, in the local police-station, he found Reynaud and members of his Government. To them came, at frequent intervals, reports of fresh disasters to the French forces, struggling against impossible odds, being broken up or thrust back everywhere.

Striding up and down the bare little room which was then the headquarters of the Government of the French Republic, Churchill harangued the worried Ministers in that quaint mixture of French and English that has often been brought into play when things have been difficult. Was all to go—was the Boche to stride across France unchecked? he demanded. Could the French Army lay down its arms, leave

the country to its fate? In a characteristic phrase (one cannot help wondering what the French made of it!) he pleaded that "the Old Firm of Britain and France" should keep up its partnership in defence of the right against tyranny and aggression.

Shrugging their shoulders helplessly, the French Ministers asked to be released from their country's pledge not to conclude a separate peace with Germany. "We can do nothing else," they pleaded.

Churchill paused in his restless pacing, stood before the Frenchmen, his eyes blazing.

"No! The honour of France is involved in this. I cannot agree to release you."

But he could see he was losing the battle.

Churchill is at his best when things are difficult, and he tried again. The conference went on on these lines:

Churchill: You tell me that all is lost! It would seem that, for the moment, you will have to leave the old Anglo-French firm. But—your place will be kept open for you, and we shall expect you to rejoin the firm in happier times!

The French (despairingly): But *all* is lost! We are conquered and over-run. And *your* turn is only a matter of a short time now!

Churchill: *Not* all is lost! We shall repulse the enemy!

The French: But how? It is impossible!

Churchill: Our Navy will sink them! Our guns will shoot them down! We shall destroy most of them that way! And, should a few still escape and climb on shore—well, *nous les frapperons sur la tête!*

Whether the French Ministers were the more startled by the sentiments or the French, history does not record.

The French Ministers, their morale almost gone, could not realize that the British Premier, faced with dangers as great, meant what he said—and was, moreover, to prove it years later, after much toil and suffering. The French—even those who wanted to fight on—found it difficult, as I have first-hand reason to know, to appreciate the unrelenting attitude of the man who was leading Britain with nothing but an offer of blood and toil, tears and sweat.

Next day, the Germans drove into unresisting Paris, past the offices where the French Government had worked, past the Arc de Triomphe, along the silent, resentful boulevards. Soon, from the top of the Eiffel Tower, the swastika flag flew, and the Germans took over everything. Paris was a German city, they boasted. The French Government fled to Bordeaux, pleaded again for release from the no-separate-peace pledge. This time, it was agreed that, if they sent the French fleet to a place of safety while the armistice negotiations were conducted, they should be freed from the pledge.

Then—with the fortunes of France at their lowest ebb, our own not much higher—Churchill made his historic offer of a union of the two nations, with joint citizenship, joint Parliament, joint Cabinets. The two nations were no longer to be two nations, but an Anglo-French Union. Every Frenchman was to enjoy at once citizenship of Great Britain, every Briton become a citizen of France.

I am told that the idea was entirely Churchill's, and that he made it on the spur of the moment, before mentioning it to the Cabinet, even.

It is necessary to have been on the inside of things—perhaps to have been present in that bare little police-station at Tours, with the worried Prefect hovering outside, keeping away the voluble peasants who wanted to know about their food rations, while the fate of a nation was decided—to appreciate to the full the effect of that offer. It was a startling one, and one that would, so the experts say, have been extremely difficult to work out. But the mere offer of this supreme gesture of friendship and comradeship when France was “down” caught the imagination of the free world.

The feasibility of the plan was never to be tested. It was too late. The French Cabinet, split from top to bottom, suddenly fell to pieces. In the morning, the Cabinet was 13 to 11 for carrying on the war. By evening, 13 were for surrender, 11 against.

Eighty-four years old Petain became Prime Minister, and the rest was inevitable.

Meanwhile, back in London, Churchill was preparing to

make yet another trip to France. He was actually in the train when the news of the fall of Reynaud reached him.

The First Lord of the Admiralty, Mr. A. V. Alexander, and the First Sea Lord, with Lord Lloyd, hurried to France to make what arrangements they could about the disposition of the French fleet. They were treated at times with great discourtesy, and at one point, it was said, were actually threatened with arrest by local French authorities. While they were in France, Petain applied to Hitler for an armistice.

Hitler's triumph over France was complete. The proud Republic was down—and it took a brave man to declare that it was not also "out." And, with the Battle of France over, what of Britain? What of Britain, with the cream of its army disarmed, the whole of its effective armed strength in the hands of the Germans?

Churchill worked day and night, with his Ministers, to make the preparations to resist the invasion which seemed certain, for the astute, all-conquering Hitler could hardly miss such a chance.

Probably not until Churchill himself writes his memoirs of those fateful weeks shall we know fully how near we were to disaster. It is not too much to say that, had Hitler struck then, while we were weakened by Dunkirk's heroic failure, while we could count almost on two hands the tanks we possessed, while every man and woman in the land was intent on building up and replacing that which had been lost on the beaches, a German invasion could hardly have failed. We had no coast defences but odd bits of barbed wire. We had no guns capable of standing up to a determined invader. We had the navy and the air force, but even they could not be everywhere.

It was touch and go.

On May 14, before things had reached their depths in France, Mr. Anthony Eden, then Churchill's Secretary of State for War, had gone on the air to appeal for men to join the Local Defence Volunteers—later to be changed, by a passing comment of the Prime Minister that he preferred the name, to the Home Guard. But they had no arms, and, with set and solemn faces, grown men drilled with

"rifles" hastily cut out of pieces of wood, fixed, by numbers, imaginary bayonets, formed into platoons and companies, elected their own officers, obeyed orders as strictly as any crack regiment.

The Home Guard sprang from the fertile imagination of Winston Churchill as he sat at dinner after a critical Cabinet meeting. His faith in the steadfastness of the British people, which never failed when all about him was chaos, and which he did so much, in good times and bad, to succour, led him to make the suggestion that every man and youth capable of bearing arms should be invited to do so. They could then "fight on the beaches, in the towns, in the hills."

It is a story that will form a proud chapter in the story of Britain. It is a story that not even the good-humoured—if admiring—laughter which, in safer and happier times, came to surround the Home Guard, can efface. Churchill himself believes that the Home Guard was the final weight thrown into the scale against Hitler, deciding him not to attempt the invasion of Britain. If the Fuehrer had known that the members of the L.D.V. had between them about as many arms as one of his well-armed regiments, he might not have hesitated. Churchill's speeches betrayed no sign of nervousness. They were as defiant as ever. It was Bluff on the grand scale.

Then, if never before or since, words stood between us and possible disaster. Ministers of all Parties joined in the campaign of shouting to keep up the nation's courage—to discourage the others. "We must gain time to make good the losses of Dunkirk, to readjust our plans," was the order Churchill gave.

## CHAPTER THE FIFTH

### THE WAR FLARES UP

DURING the Battle of France, Churchill had to make a fateful decision. The French Government, faced with disaster, appealed to the British Government to send into the battle the metropolitan air force based in Britain. The



Air Ministry did not care to make the decision on its own account. The matter was remitted to the War Cabinet. The War Cabinet felt that so vital a decision must be made by the Head of the Government himself, and it was left to Mr. Churchill.

It was not an easy problem. The cases for and against the action were equally strong.

The French, almost at the end of their resources, pleaded that the weight of the British air force, thrown in at the psychological moment, when the German army was poised for the kill, might just turn the scale in France's favour.

But Churchill knew how dangerously small the air force available was. He had to face the argument of the Air Marshals, which was this: If we send our metropolitan air force into action in France, it can make no appreciable difference to the final result, and we shall inevitably lose many machines—if not, indeed, the lot. Relatively to the German strength, we are weak already. Therefore, if we lose many machines we shall, with our production machinery concentrated, as it must be, mainly on producing arms for the army, be powerless to resist when the Luftwaffe flies against England.

The problem was therefore: Which is the greater service to the cause of Freedom: to send our planes into a hopeless, if spectacular and honourable, fight over France, with the virtual certainty that they will be lost, or to conserve them for the coming Battle of Britain? Is it better to ensure that one Bastion of Freedom stands, or to risk all on defending one that is about to fall?

They were not without their political angles, these questions. There were some who were ready to attack the Government, even in those crucial days, for its "timidity." The Germans were plugging their sneer that Britain was ready to fight to the last Frenchman. A decision to send the air force to the aid of France, forlorn hope as it was, would have been the easier course—for the moment, at any rate. A decision to retain the force in this country had about it nothing of the spectacularly heroic quality for which the times seemed to call.

But, after many hours of anxious thought, Churchill decided that the Allied cause as a whole would best be served by keeping our Air Force as intact as possible, by conserving its strength against the time when the full fury of the German war-machine was turned on Britain. For, he reasoned, if Britain fell, *all* was lost.

All Churchill's natural chivalry—ironically enough, it was to get him into trouble more than once in the course of the war—was for making the supreme sacrifice for France, and, if need be, going down in a blaze of self-sacrificing glory. But there has always been about Winston a considerable amount of hard-headed realism, and he looks ahead a great deal more carefully and cautiously than the casual observer might think.

On this occasion, he looked ahead to the Battle of Britain. It was no mere fluke that his decision to retain the Air Force was so closely followed by the supreme test in the British air. Even before France fell, he was warning all concerned, in public—and even more insistently in private—that Hitler would soon try to subjugate Britain from the air.

So, "in spite of every kind of pressure," as he put it, he ordered that the fighter strength of the R.A.F. should not be consumed in a futile fight over France.

When, in due time, more facts than are at present available become known, I do not think Churchill will be judged to be wrong. France was falling, and Britain was clearly to be the "keep"—to use one of the phrases so dear to the heart of the historically minded Premier—against the forward march of Hitlerism. So, the great and fateful decision was taken and recorded: the metropolitan air force will remain here.

Acting on his theory that the immediate peril to Britain lay in the air, Churchill ordered the greatest possible speed-up in aircraft production. To Lord Beaverbrook, holding the newly invented post of Minister of Aircraft Production, went imperative orders to produce aircraft at all costs.

Beaverbrook—as all the world knows, never a man to allow the grass to grow under his feet—went to it with a

will. Within a few days of his taking office, there were stories (half-complaining, half-admiring) that he had raided the preserves of other Ministers for the raw materials of aircraft. One Minister concerned with the production of munitions—so ran the story told with relish in Whitehall—had obtained, with great sweat and travail, a big consignment of a certain vital machine-part from the United States. So anxious was he that nothing should go wrong, that he had not mentioned the windfall even to the War Cabinet. It was "Top Secret."

The crates of parts arrived in a distant port. The glad news was telephoned to the Minister direct, and he personally ordered a fleet of lorries to collect the precious cargo, to bring it with all speed to London.

The fleet of lorries (said the storytellers) duly arrived at the distant port, swept majestically into the dockyard. Gratified Ministry officials asked about the crates. Puzzled dock officials asked: What crates?

The customary argument and production of documents and counter-documents followed, and then it was found that the crates had already been collected. By whom? Well, a very high official of the Ministry of Aircraft Production had come in person, in a special car, bearing an order signed by the Minister himself, that the goods were to be handed over at once to the fleet of lorries Lord Beaverbrook had sent to the docks!

So we got a lot more aeroplanes—even if we got a few less tanks or whatever war machines the parts were originally intended for!

A wave of patriotism such as no dictator-ridden country could ever know swept over Britain.

An Air Commodore complained to me that "that fellow Beaverbrook doesn't seem to sleep himself—and doesn't seem to think anyone else needs to!" But he, too, went on working.

There was another story that helped to bring laughter to those sombre days, about an all-night conference between Churchill and Beaverbrook, in Downing Street, which went on until dawn. It ended with both Ministers almost sagging over their papers.

"What are you going to do now?" asked Churchill, "*I'm taking a nap!*"

So it went on; stories gathered around the personalities of the men who were driving; hates grew up, and rivalries—healthy and otherwise. But, all the time, the supply of airplanes was mounting, and Mr. Churchill was soon able to say that he looked forward with confidence to the exploits of our fighter pilots "who will have the glory of saving their native land, their island home, and all they love, from the most deadly of all attacks."

In the same speech, Churchill forecast the speedy coming of bombing attacks on a large scale. It was Churchill's job to steer the nation's mind towards the thought of large-scale bombing attacks, with hundreds—possibly thousands—of German planes hurling death down on the towns and cities and countryside of Britain.

It was a risky business. None knew just how the people, already severely shocked, would react to heavy bombing. None doubted the bravery of the people of Britain—but heavy bombing was something new, something terrible, and even the most resolute and determined human mind and body cannot stand up to everything the devilish can invent.

There were those close to the Prime Minister who advocated a policy of wait and see, who wanted him to let the raids come, and *then* talk to the people. "It may never happen!" they cried.

Perhaps with the recollection of the way in which that fatal phrase had been used, in the past, to meet his plea for preparations to meet the threat of the Dictators, Churchill brushed it aside. Once more, his unfailing slogan: "Trust the people!" came into use.

"I shall tell them the worst," he said. "They won't let the Old Country down!"

But it was not all blood and tears. There was in his speeches a judicious admixture of the hope of reward without which no man can labour long. "During the last war, we repeatedly asked the question 'How are we going to win?' and no one was ever able to answer with much precision until at the end, quite suddenly, quite

unexpectedly, our terrible foe collapsed before us, and we were so glutted with victory that, in our folly, we cast it away."

He struck the big drum of patriotic appeal, too—and it says a great deal for his influence and oratory that never once was there a cynical touch among those who listened, people who might, in other days, contemptuously have called it "flag-wagging."

Even our best friends believed that we might be invaded. The attitude of the people of Britain—whether they expressed it, or merely left it to be taken for granted—was: "Let the Germans try!"

It was then that Mr. Churchill chose to make one of those prophetic utterances which will live in the history of oratory.

"Hitler," said he, "knows that he will have to break us in this island or lose the war. If we can stand up to him, all Europe may be free and the life of the world will move forward into broad, sunlit uplands; but if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, and all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age more sinister, and perhaps more prolonged, by the lights of a perverted science.

"Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duty and so bear ourselves that if the British Commonwealth and Empire last for a thousand years men will still say: 'This was their finest hour!'"

I remember the thrill it caused, that call to battle.

But the French Government, under Pétain, had ignored the condition about the placing of the French fleet in a place of safety. Clearly, in our hour of mortal peril, something had to be done about it. The Cabinet gave long hours to a discussion of the steps to be taken. It was decided that, at all costs, the French fleet must be prevented from falling into the hands of the Germans.

That night, British warships and aeroplanes in many parts of the world received startling orders. Naval officers in command of ports were told to take over, by whatever means were found to be necessary, all French ships in their control. Those at Alexandria were bluntly ordered not to

leave, and it was added that if they tried to do so, they would be sunk. In North Africa, at Oran, after a whole day's talk, the French officers declined either to join the British or sail their ships to the U.S.A. A British squadron opened fire, damaged and sank some of the French ships.

Churchill paid generous tribute to the gallantry of the French officers and men who obeyed the orders of their Government—even though they failed to perceive that by their very loyalty and devotion they were aiding the bitter enemies of the country for which they were prepared to give their lives.

To the British Government it was a tragedy that drastic action should have to be taken against the French ships, but the decision was unanimous. It may well have been one of the turning points of the war for Freedom. Had the Germans had command of the French fleet, the whole course of events might have been different.

As Churchill said, in reporting to the sorrowful House of Commons: "I leave the judgment of our action, with confidence, to the world—and history."

## CHAPTER THE SIXTH

### THEIR FINEST HOUR

WHILE the nation toiled and sweated at its multifarious tasks, striving to prepare Britain to meet the ordeal of attempted invasion, while the remnants of the British Expeditionary Force gathered around it the recruits who were flooding into the Forces, while defences were being built along our long coastline, in our streets, across our very pastures, Winston Churchill worked in the Cabinet Room and before the microphone.

There can be few who recall those times who would disagree with the statement that the Prime Minister's speeches then kept the nation at the fever-heat that was essential if men and women were to "go to it" and—even more important—keep at it, as men and women have never worked before.

This, indeed, was their finest hour. Skilfully Churchill brought everyone in the land into the battle, made them feel that on *their* efforts might depend the difference between victory and defeat. To the high-ups he addressed a directly worded memorandum telling them that all must pull together, that no defeatism could be tolerated, that anyone—however highly placed—who talked alarm and despondency (the current jargon phrase) was to be removed. Only thus, he said, would they be worthy of the men in the Services who had already met the enemy “without any sense of being outmatched in martial qualities.”

“Should the invader come,” said Winston, in a broadcast in July, 1940, “there will be no placid lying down of the people in submission before him as we have seen—alas!—in other countries. We shall defend every village, every town and every city. The vast mass of London itself, fought street by street, could easily devour an entire hostile army, and we would rather see London laid in ruins and ashes than that it should be tamely and abjectly enslaved.”

I remember how we of the Home Guard shouldered our wooden rifles with greater precision and determination as that call rang out. I remember that men and women who had never heard a shot fired in anger resolved to defend the land to the last. All this may sound a little old-fashioned now, a trifle jingo even. It was not then. Then, it was stark reality. Britain *was* in mortal peril of invasion by the German hordes. Britain *would* be defended to the last. On that, everybody in the land was resolved.

This resolution was soon to be put to the test, although not precisely in the way most had expected.

Away back in the 1914–18 war, Churchill had had the task of organizing London's air defences. It was a simple task, compared with that which now faced him. As he records in *World Crisis*, he called in 1914 for a “report on one sheet of paper” showing all the anti-aircraft guns available, afloat and ashore. “No one,” he wrote, and this, remember, was in 1914, “can doubt that aerial attack upon England must be a feature of the near future.”

He might have circulated the same memorandum in 1940. For quite other reasons, the list of anti-aircraft guns could have been put on "one sheet of paper." We had so few. Jokes were told about our having taken one gun from a Scottish museum, to make a show on Westminster Bridge. It was only *just* a joke ; things really were nearly as bad.

Planning the defence of Britain against air attack in 1914, Winston had (to the open amusement of the experts) expressed the view that the best method of defending London was to attack the German airfields. But, in addition, there should be a ring of defences around the big cities, with searchlights working with each group of guns. And—a revolution this, in 1914—the aerodromes ("Both of them !" as he put it, with a wry grin) were to be connected up by telephone, so that they would be ready for quick action at any time. The experts (who regarded Winston's ideas about aeroplanes being used to drop bombs as "the waste of good machines and pilots !") almost died of laughing. But they had to put the scheme into effect.

And, a quarter of a century later, what was in all essentials the same scheme, the same plan of campaign, was to win for us the Battle of Britain. Once more, "no one could doubt that aerial attack upon England must be a feature of the near future."

Painfully, something like a ring of defences was put around London and other populous areas. Searchlights were grouped with the guns. And a telephone system of a scope, speed and efficiency that would make a Hollywood film producer groan with envy was installed. From an office near London, it was possible to get, in five seconds, any air station, anti-aircraft site, any Minister or officer concerned with the Air Defence of Great Britain. The seed of 1914 had produced an enormous tree.

Slowly, but surely, the foundations of the triumph that was the Battle of Britain were being laid. The armed forces were getting more and better arms. The Home Guard was growing in size and efficiency. The war factories were getting into their stride.

Then the storm broke.

London's air-raid warnings shrieked their raucous



warning—"Banshee wailings," as Churchill called them, in ordering that they be cut down from two minutes to one, and renamed "Alerts" instead of "Alarms." For the first time, the people of central London, and the suburbs, heard the scream and crash of bombs that was later to become so tragically familiar. Though startled, London was not greatly perturbed.

But the air attacks were building up, in size and in intensity. The banshees screamed more and more often. Over the Channel, the air fighting was almost continuous, and scores of German planes were shot down. Our own losses, too, were heavy. These were the early skirmishes of the Battle of Britain.

The "Little Wars" in places like Somaliland went on.

In the midst of all this, Churchill gave the House of Commons another war review. It was in that speech that Mr. Churchill coined the phrase that has become perhaps the most famous and widely quoted of all the many he created in his wartime speeches.

Voicing the pride of the nation in those young airmen—many of them fresh from the schoolroom—who were clawing Germany's "invincible" Luftwaffe out of the skies, Churchill used the phrase: "Never in the field of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few!"

It summed up precisely the feelings—and the debt—of the whole free world.

Another part of the speech was less popular. He announced that it was proposed to give the United States a lease of British Transatlantic possessions on which naval and air defence facilities could be established by the Americans.

Nobody could then foresee—Churchill certainly did not—that the Japanese would be insane enough to force into the war, as a united and one-minded nation, the powerful United States of America, and that the leased possessions were to play a vital part in the Allied victories to come. It would be too much to claim that this leasing of islands was a piece of far-sighted statesmanship by the British Government. When they leased to the U.S.A. something the U.S.A. wanted it was because we so badly needed

destroyers for our convoys. We had to sell the piano, as one Cabinet Minister ruefully put it to me, to pay our way.

As a hot August neared its end, the Germans bombed the City of London, leaving one big building blazing and the wrecks of fifty blazing German planes on England's fields and streets. Day and night the sirens sounded. The Germans announced that their raid on the last day of August was the most intense of the war.

Irrepressible London wits, borrowing the idiom of the films, announced grimly to each other that they "Ain't seen nothin' yet!"

How right they were! As the first week of the second year of the war opened, three waves of German planes, each a hundred strong, tried to force their way in over the Kentish coast. They were driven back, with the loss of 25. We lost 15, but the pilots of nine were saved.

The same day, the Germans torpedoed in the Atlantic a ship bound for Canada with 320 evacuee children aboard; but all the children were saved.

Those who had talked about a "phoney war" were silent. This was living up to forecasts made by the derided "realists." We went on bombing German airfields, in France and elsewhere. The Germans sent more and more planes against us.

Then the "Blitzkrieg" burst on London—to become known, in a week or two, by the almost affectionate abbreviation of "Blitz." Swift light bombers set dockside buildings alight so that they would serve as indicators for the heavy bombers to come. Great damage was done, casualties were heavy, hundreds killed, more than a thousand seriously injured.

As I recall it, we who had for so long expected big raids could hardly realize that, at last, they had come. We looked at the shattered buildings and the scurrying ambulances, and we found it hard to believe that this was London. Then we looked at the sweating, toiling, bleeding Air Raid Precautions men and women—who had been known for months, half-enviously, half-mockingly, as "The Dart Board Brigade," because they had had little to do but stand and wait, which seemed no service at all

to the harassed war-workers—and we pulled ourselves together and went to it once more.

Up to the microphone again stepped Churchill, with another pep-talk. The bombing was part of Hitler's invasion plan, he said, and while the bombs were falling self-propelled invasion boats were being concentrated at points on the French coast.

The bombs hit London's East End, wiping out a school being used as a shelter. They hit Buckingham Palace, damaging the private rooms of the King and Queen. They shattered cottage and mansion, upset the public services, killed and maimed.

But "London"—as anonymous people scrawled on shattered walls with odd bits of chalk—"can take it." Churchill spent his time between Downing Street and the headquarters of Fighter Command on London's outskirts.

He always got great amusement from the fact (he was never a lover of excessive secrecy) that although the whereabouts of this H.Q. was so "secret" that nobody ever referred to it, there was on the gate of the mansion in which it was housed a board six feet high, announcing in great letters that it was the Headquarters, Fighter Command!

From that quiet place, the Battle of Britain was carried on. From Downing Street, Churchill and his Ministers watched its progress, anxiously but confidently. Winston had one habit which greatly perturbed his intimates: he *would* go and see for himself what was happening at the height of a raid. Many a time, in his famous "siren-suit," a queer outfit resembling a cross between a blue battle-dress and a set of workman's overalls, a steel helmet at an angle that would have got him "crimed" by any sergeant-major, a walking-stick in one hand, an electric-torch in the other, a half-smoked cigar in his mouth, he would stump off up Whitehall to "have a look." Once he was brusquely ordered to move on by a worried policeman who did not recognize in this strange figure the Minister of Defence himself. Once he skipped into a doorway just in time to avoid flying debris.

As often as not he would climb up to the top of the highest building in Whitehall, with panting officials behind him, to watch the progress of a raid. On one such occasion, when the chill of autumn was in the air, he took his place on the roof, with some other Ministers and secretaries, who suggested that he should put on an overcoat.

"Don't *fuss*!" he said. "I'm perfectly warm; for Heaven's sake don't try to mollycoddle me!"

After a few moments, a worried-looking man came on to the roof, stood looking irresolutely at the Prime Minister for a moment, and went. Five minutes later he was up again, only to retire once more without a word. Ten minutes passed, and the man reappeared, more worried than ever, to stand silently before Churchill.

"Well; what do *you* want?" asked the Premier from his seat on the parapet.

"If—if you'll kindly excuse me, sir——"

"Yes, yes! What *is* it?"

"You're sitting on the smoke-vent, sir, and the building's full of smoke!"

Churchill was to have first-hand experience of the bombing which deprived so many of their homes. While he was at dinner in Downing Street one night, a bomb came down and smashed the Treasury building, only a few yards away, killing twelve people. No. 10 was not, on that occasion, very severely damaged, but the Prime Minister and the other Ministers who were dining with him were smothered in soup and water as the big crystal chandelier over the table crashed down into their midst.

Brendan Bracken, Sir Archibald Sinclair, the Air Minister, and other Ministers, who were at dinner with him, urged Churchill to go to the shelters, but, with a grin, he refused. Instead, he set to work to clear up the mess, saying over his shoulder: "You go to the shelter, if you want to!"

Suddenly he remembered the domestic staff, and hurried off to tell his cook to take shelter.

"Pooh!" said that fearless lady, "you get on with your dinner!"

As if to emphasize her words, she insisted on bringing the guests their coffee, which was served in an atmosphere made hazy by the dust from the ceiling which had been torn down.

Looking ruefully at his suit, which was covered with dusty plaster, Churchill resolved to have a "siren" suit, and the outfit that was soon to become world-famous was devised.

On another occasion, when a nearby bomb had shattered the windows and doors of 10, Downing Street, some soldiers hurried into the street to see if they could be of assistance. A head appeared at an upper window, looking interestedly at the wreckage.

Cupping his hands, one soldier yelled up to the owner of the head: "You all right, mate?"

"Fine, thanks! Are *you* all right?" was the cheery reply.

"That," said a policeman to the astonished soldiers, "was the Prime Minister!"

As the bombs fell, as London and many another great city burned, Churchill kept up his counter-barrage of speeches. For Mussolini, he had the deepest contempt as one who had stabbed brave France in the back when she seemed most helpless. "The jackal, the guttersnipe," he called him—and it is strange to recall that there were, at the time, some who thought this method "undignified." For Hitler he had more respect, but an equally implacable determination to defeat and downfall.

"I'll get Hitler yet. I'll crush him and his war-machine until there is nothing left of it. This sort of thing must not happen again—ever, in the history of the world!" He said that to a friend of mine, at a time when Britain was alone in the fight against the conqueror of all Europe, when it seemed highly problematical whether we could keep the conqueror from our own shores. I have never heard anyone claim that they heard him admit, even in private, the possibility of defeat.

It was Couéism on the grand scale.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH

“HAVING A LOOK”

A GOOD many people were worried about Churchill's habit of “having a look” when there was danger about. A good many people felt it their duty to tell him he ought not to risk his life unnecessarily. He had a simple way with all these “busybodies” as he called them—he just listened, and turned away without a word.

Only once did he retort, and then he said to a particularly close friend who had urged him to “go carefully”: “You can't teach an old dog new tricks!” And, picking up his stick, he went out into the blitz.

Those who knew his adventurous spirit realized from the first that it was hopeless to try to stop him taking risks. When, back in the days when aeroplanes were a rather crazy novelty, he was learning to fly (in itself almost a certifiable thing, in the minds of most people), Asquith, the Prime Minister, was urged to prevent the adventure of his Minister.

“I have no reason to suppose,” he retorted, “that I have any such persuasive powers as are suggested!”

Yet those efforts to fly several times nearly deprived the nation of the man who was later, by common consent, to become its saviour, and to play a great part in saving the world.

When piloting himself, his plane crashed at Croydon when the “joy-stick” failed to work. It was a nasty crash, but once more he crawled out of the splintered machine, and, two hours later, was presiding over a dinner at the House of Commons.

Worried colleagues, officials, even August Personages, shook their heads as the records of risks and lucky escapes mounted, but, like Asquith, they had no confidence that their persuasive powers were great enough to deal with this self-willed young man. A quarter of a century later, even more worried colleagues, officials and August Personages

were to shake their heads as an older, but certainly no less venturesome, Winston Churchill took great risks in order to "see for himself"—or, as he always put it, to "have a look."

Many a time, as the bombs screamed down, Churchill saw buildings hit and falling in ruins a short distance from him. Several times he was among the first on the spot when a bomb had done great damage to life and property. More than one startled policeman or air-raid warden got his orders direct from Britain's supreme War Lord, and in no uncertain or vague terms.

As 1940 ended, Hitler launched his great attempt to burn London. Incendiary bombs by the hundred thousand were hurled on the capital, burning and searing the historic buildings of the ancient city, sending offices, shops, churches and hospitals up in flames, killing men, women and children.

I was there. It was a grim sight, possibly—certainly—the most terrible since the Great Fire in 1666, perhaps even surpassing that. There was something fascinating, almost beautiful, in the red, scorching flames, as they jumped from building to building, flashed and flickered across streets, licked and destroyed edifices and landmarks famous over all the civilized world. Little bookshops that had given most City workers and many a scholar hours of pleasure just disappeared in the swirling sea of red flame. Plate-glass windows bulged and burst under the heat, filling the streets shin-deep with sharp splinters.

Now and then, sweating, soot-grimed men and women would pause to glance anxiously towards the towering St. Paul's Cathedral. Only occasionally, when there was a break in the clouds of smoke, could any of the vast building be seen. In the devilish illumination, the great gold cross at the top of the dome seemed to shine out, now brilliant gold, now blood-red as the fires below changed their character, waxed and waned.

I remember a man in greasy overalls, sweating as he toiled to save a church from destruction—he was a printer snatching a few moments from his work in a nearby

newspaper office—pausing a moment, looking towards the smoke-enveloped cathedral, and saying to me: "You know, mate, I ain't a religious bloke—I never go to church, and I don't pray, or anything. But I should hate to see dear old St. Paul's hurt or damaged. Somehow—you know what I mean, mate—somehow—well, blast it all, it's *London*, ain't it?"

Many an obscure man and woman became a hero or a heroine that Night of the Long Flames.

The ancient Guildhall of the City of London perished that night, along with eight Wren churches, and countless offices and shops and flats. While the stinking ruins still smoked Mr. Churchill motored into the City and inspected the damage.

Standing on a pile of rubble that had been the Guildhall—where the giant Gog and Magog figures had looked down on centuries of pageantry such as the City of London alone could provide, where feastings and rejoicings had taken place since the times when London was a walled city, rich and proudly aloof—Winston Churchill made a decision that was to cause more controversy, and more approval, than possibly any he made before or after. He decided that there must be compulsory fire-watching.

Turning to a secretary, he ordered that plans be made at once for all able-bodied men to take turns at watching for, and dealing with, fire-bombs. The secretary hurried off, for he may have known that plans were already in hand for an important Minister to broadcast—to the effect that there would be *no* such plan!

The manuscript was caught in time, and the necessary reversal of policy was duly recorded. Churchill's decision had deep psychological implications as well as the strictly utilitarian use of dealing with fires. The nation was divided between the fighting men and "the others." The others, engaged on vital war work as they were, sometimes tended to feel that they were not doing enough on the active side of the war. To be called on to fire-watch went some way to meet this desire. Fire-watching was later to become a bore and something of a joke, but in those early days, at least, it was anything but a joke. Men—and later women—took



their lives in their hands as they struggled over rickety roofs and even more rickety ladders to their fire-watch posts. There was little grouching, still less "dodging the column." Everyone felt there was a duty to be done, and they did it.

It is impossible to compute just how many lives, how much property, great and small, that swift decision saved. But a high official who knows as much about it as anyone told me that, on the basis of the City of London fire, the damage saved probably ran into hundreds of millions, the lives saved into tens of thousands.

"This," the Prime Minister said, as he stood in the ruins of Guildhall, "must never happen again!"

Going to the microphone, the Prime Minister uttered another of those clarion calls of his. He denounced "that wicked man, Hitler," cried: "What he has done is to kindle a fire in British hearts, here and all over the world, which will glow long after all traces of the conflagrations in London have been removed. He has lighted a fire which will burn with a steady and consuming flame until the last vestiges of Nazi tyranny have been burnt out of Europe, and until the Old World and the New can join hands to rebuild the temples of man's freedom and man's honour on foundations which will not soon or easily be overthrown." There was about that radio speech just the right amount of defiance, of wistful forward-looking, of pride of race. Once more, Winston had found, and struck, precisely the right note.

Somebody made a decision that angered the long-suffering, joking people of London. And London, angry, can be very difficult. It was decreed that the Underground stations should not be used for shelters. London took not the slightest notice of the rule. London will obey any order, however stringent, it thinks is "sense," will ignore any rule it is convinced is "rot." And the rule against using the Tubes as shelters was emphatically in the "rot" class. Harassed officials reported that the crowds had taken matters into their own hands, were using the stations, permitted or not.

Then into the story came Mrs. Churchill, whose shadowy,

handsome figure had occasionally appeared in pictures with the Prime Minister, but whose own public appearances had been infrequent. She—to the horror of the officials—went to "have a look" for herself, and swiftly decided that something ought to be done about it. Over dinner that night she told the Prime Minister what she had seen, pressed that something should be done to meet the needs of the homeless—and quickly. "You work something out," she was told.

In her private campaign, Mrs. Churchill had a powerful ally, Lord Beaverbrook. He visited tube stations, walked among the men, women and children huddled on the platforms, heard them cheerfully singing popular songs, and returned to Whitehall deeply impressed. Before long, plans were laid before the Prime Minister, not only to make the Tube stations available, but to provide bunks in which the shelterers could sleep. Two million bunks were ordered.

And so the crowds went to the shelters each night, paying their three-ha'pences, buying their lives on the hire-purchase system, struggling down to the depths with their bundles of bedding and their cans of tea.

Only once was Churchill induced to "take cover" in a shelter. Then, while the bombs screeched down outside, he was almost bundled into a shelter by his valet and a member of his Government. Protesting loudly that it was "all damned nonsense" he sat on a wooden form, with a hefty meat sandwich—his dinner—in one hand and a "glass of something" in the other.

The moment the bombs stopped, and while his watchful custodians were not looking, he cut and run for it, and was back at work in a few minutes!

On May 10, 1941, in one of the last severe raids London was to suffer—from piloted craft—the Debating Chamber of the House of Commons was shattered. First, a great oil bomb crashed down, plumb on to the Debating Chamber, setting it ablaze. As the flames chewed at the historic table, the Speaker's Chair, the dispatch boxes which Gladstone had pounded in his eloquence, and at which Churchill had stood for many an hour, a great high-

explosive bomb crashed into the middle of the flames, shattering the place to a heap of smoking, dusty rubble.

Not long afterwards, and while the place still smoked, Churchill, with Lord Beaverbrook, went to look at it. I was with them, and as we looked at the place that had been the scene of so many triumphs, so many setbacks, so much of his life, I saw tears streaming down Churchill's face. He did not try to stop them, or even wipe them away. Grinding his stick into the charred wreckage, he let his gaze wander slowly round the unfamiliar place that had once been so familiar to him, as if saying a last farewell. For a long time, he was silent. Then he turned abruptly, walked out of the wreckage, into the parts of the building that had escaped.

"The Chamber," he said to an official, "must be rebuilt—just as it was. Meanwhile, we shall not lose a single day's debate through this!"

And it is on record that Parliament never *did* lose a day's debate, never paused in its work, because of the fell work of the Luftwaffe that night.

## CHAPTER THE EIGHTH

### A SPLIT IN THE CABINET

ALMOST from the moment he entered the Government on the outbreak of war, Winston Churchill led what all political journalists, and most politicians, most enjoy (at any rate in less grave times), a "split in the Cabinet."

But this was no intrigue against a leader, no sordid plotting against a policy. He showed his hand, and made his voice heard, in unmistakable manner. What was the great issue on which the split occurred?

It was whether Parliament should move out of London if the air-raids or other circumstances made the capital untenable. Many of the Ministers said, "Yes, we ought to go, for the direction of the war is all-important, and



With Mrs. Churchill, after his severe illness.



Back to "funny hats." Winston with a young friend.



A Military Conference Winston talks secrets with General Eisenhower  
—"Ike" to him



Into Battle With Field Marshal Montgomery and U S officers at the Front

Parliament must be in as safe a place as possible, while it does its work."

But Churchill said: "No, we cannot allow ourselves to be driven from the capital, whatever the cost! It is unthinkable that Parliament and the Government should be forced to leave the centre of Government. And, anyway, I, for one, *won't go!*"

Elaborate plans had been made—as was only prudent—for an alternative meeting-place for Parliament, and these were a "Top Secret." Even important Members of Parliament were not told where they were to go, but were merely informed that suitable accommodation had been found for them, and that an alternative Parliament House had been arranged.

For the first few months of the war, Ministers, Peers, M.P.s, Parliamentary journalists, officials, all kept their bags packed, ready for the Great Exodus.

Mysterious pink forms, and even more melodramatic cards, with "code-stamps," to be attached to the coat lapel, were handed out, in heavily sealed envelopes. The new meeting-place of Parliament was indicated only as "The Destination." The only clue—a slender one—was that it was reached by a train leaving from Paddington. All had to report daily to a report centre, like so many anarchists, to be told whether "The Black Plan" or some alternative was to come into effect.

The destination was, in fact, to have been the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, at Stratford-on-Avon, and many buildings in the neighbourhood were to serve as Government offices, billets for our legislators, with their attendant minions.

The scheme was never brought into operation. Churchill, behind the scenes, with the aid of forthright "Josh" (afterwards Lord) Wedgwood before the scenes, laughed it out of court. I am told that he put into that campaign all the humorous invective of which he is capable—and those who remember his attacks on Ramsay MacDonald as "The Boneless Wonder" and his long, witty wrangle with Philip Snowden, will realize what his fellow-Ministers must have suffered in those days!



But Parliament did move—about 200 yards, to the Church House, Westminster, headquarters and Parliament House of the Church of England. The building had itself been severely damaged by bombs, and the great circular hall was smashed beyond use, but it was judged to be safer than the somewhat flimsy fabric of Barry's Palace of Westminster.

The temporary House of Commons, prepared for its new task in a few days, looked like a film set. Benches, covered in green fabric in imitation of the green leather of the "real thing," had been arranged in rows, the Government on one side, the Opposition on the other. Between, in place of the massive table and the brass-bound dispatch boxes, there was a table that swayed a little as the busy Clerks moved in and out, and a couple of light leather-covered dispatch boxes that echoed hollowly if anyone had the temerity to pound them in the course of excited oratory.

But it was Mr. Speaker's Chair that aroused the most comment. In place of the massive, dignified, carved oak affair, with its great canopy, reaching half-way to the ceiling, there was an armchair such as might be found in any club, surmounted by a light wooden canopy covered with blue cloth. The canopy swayed and quivered ominously as the occupant of the Chair moved, and gave the impression that it was lifted straight from some village-hall production of a Parliamentary drama.

The House of Lords had an even stranger appearance. In place of the great Gilded Chamber, with its wide spaces, and the two glittering golden Thrones, and the scarlet-leather benches, and the vast candelabra, and the general air of spacious dignity, there was a hall considerably smaller than many a private drawing-room. At one end, two small gilded chairs had been placed, on a foot-high dais, to serve as Thrones. Less than a yard away, on each side, chairs were placed, to form the Government and Opposition benches. In the centre was a "Woolsack" not more than a yard square, in place of the great "sack" that had accommodated the Lord Chancellor and all his many reference books. The public and Press galleries

seated precisely twenty people—if they squeezed in tightly.

I was one of the fewer than a hundred people who saw the only Royal Opening of Parliament which took place in that strange "reproduction" House of Lords. It all took place in great secrecy, and not even Peers and M.P.s knew in advance that the King was to perform the ceremony in person. Instead of the gilded State coach, passing through streets lined with scarlet-coated troops, there came a car bearing the King in Admiral-of-the-Fleet's uniform, the Queen in black, with a rope of pearls.

The ermine-trimmed robes of scarlet velvet were left in the safety of the Royal wardrobes. The Crowns, the glitter of which leaves the peacetime beholder breathless and admiring, as their wearers take their places on the Thrones, were left safely locked up in the steel-lined vaults of the Tower of London. The peers did not, as is usual in peacetime, wear their scarlet robes. About forty or fifty of them crowded into the tiny room—against the six hundred or so who normally attend a Royal opening. Two judges, wigged and gowned, entered, to represent their scores of brother occupants of the Bench. Mr. Speaker, with a dozen or so Members of the House of Commons, came in due time to the Bar of the House.

Putting on his gold-braided cap, the King read the Speech from the Throne, calling on all for a supreme effort, pledging a fight to victory. There was a new ring in the King's voice that morning—a ring of grim determination. It gave expression to the mood of the nation.

It must have been the strangest Royal Opening of Parliament ever performed in Britain, and it took place on November 21, 1940. The short speech over, the King and Queen went, squeezing past the attendant who held open the narrow door, glancing back over their shoulders as they went, as though to fix in their memories the unusual setting. They entered their car, were driven swiftly away. Parliament, in bomb-scarred, war-torn London, was carrying on.

In spite of the "doll's house" proportions of the temporary Chamber, the make-do set-up, the ceremony had a

dignity and a solemnity none of those who saw it will readily forget. A new chapter had been written in Britain's history-book.

Twelve times the Houses of Parliament were damaged in air-raids, sometimes severely, sometimes only slightly. Several officials and policemen died there; Peers, M.P.s and officials who were in the Home Guard company formed there were wounded.

But, never for a moment was Parliament prevented from sitting, never for a moment did the Luftwaffe triumph over free debate.

When the flying bombs began to rain on London, it was considered advisable to move once more into the stronger building—and the sittings went on to an accompaniment of roars and crashes. More than once, the doors were hurled violently open by the concussion of a bomb falling nearby, and the crash of glass and falling masonry drowned the voice of the Member addressing the House. He or she usually paused for a second, commented: "As I was saying . . ." and went on with the speech.

Another time, windows were blown in while the House was at work. Frequently the "Danger Imminent" signal sounded loudly through the building, as the bombs roared overhead, but on not one occasion did Parliament adjourn to the shelters.

On only one occasion was the work of Parliament delayed long by an Alert—on September 3, 1939, when the sirens shrieked a few moments after the war had formally been declared. Knowing the treachery of the Nazis, officialdom (and, indeed, the whole country) regarded that raid as the most "likely" of all, and acted accordingly. People passing down Whitehall were almost forced into shelters. Anxious officials shepherded M.P.s and Peers into the shelters in the basement of the Houses of Parliament, and the Great Elected and their Lordships sat there, on hard wooden forms, grumbling about the waste of time and the insistence of the officials on their taking cover.

Churchill was in his Westminster flat. When it was suggested that he should go to the shelter, he replied

testily : "That be damned ! I've got work to do !" And he went on with his preparations.

## CHAPTER THE NINTH

## FIDO WINS THROUGH

TOUGH and ruthless as he could be when occasion demanded, determined as he was that victory should crown the efforts of the United Nations to overthrow dictatorships and aggression, Winston Churchill was always conscious that in the process he, as supreme chief of Britain's fighting forces, must make it his duty to save Allied lives by every means in his power.

Not for him was the attitude of the autocrat : "We must win our objectives, whatever the cost in human lives !" To him, men have never been cannon-fodder, but sons and brothers and fathers, all something more precious than life to someone. All through his public speeches—and even more through his private utterances—that thread had always run : If a life can be saved, we will do what we have to do some other way, some slower way ; or we will wait a little.

The man who could—not indeed without grim thought for the lives it must cost—order the wiping out of some vital German target would wince, his eyes filled with tears, when he was handed the British casualty lists. To him, it will always be a source of pride that we survived the greatest peril of our national history with but a small fraction of the losses that occurred in the 1914-18 war. That was not entirely accounted for by the unguided course of events, the "shape" of the war. Many an hour Churchill and his Ministers spent, in the depth of the war's crises, plotting and planning to save life and limb.

But, plot and plan as he would, there was one source of casualties which obstinately refused to yield to treatment : crashes on airfields, due to fog. "It seems so ironical,"

said he, "that the men who have survived all the perils of the air over Germany should crash, *on their own doorsteps*, as they get home!"

For months, Churchill urged the experts, in a series of pungently worded, if brief, minutes, to find some way of dispersing fogs at aerodromes, so that aircraft could land safely. He fretted and fumed as the experts returned the same report: "It can't be done!"

He called in "The Proff"—the name by which all officialdom knows Professor Lord Cherwell, whose striking part in the conduct of the war, as an adviser behind the scenes, has yet to be told—but never will, if that publicity-shy nobleman has his way. It was on a day when the experts had given a more than usually positive report against the possibility of ever dispersing fog by artificial means that the Prime Minister and his old friend talked the matter over quietly. "The Proff" casually mentioned that he had himself carried out experiments twenty years before and expressed the view that "the thing *could* be done."

To Churchill a thing that *could* be done was a thing that *should* be done, if it helped the war effort. Lord Cherwell's record as a scientist was good enough to convince the Prime Minister that the "No!" of the experts need not necessarily be taken for an answer. It needed a great deal of optimism to take the view that the experiments of the experts, which had been going on since the 1914-18 war, were not conclusive, and that they might yet be made to succeed. But the decision was made.

Too often, men who had braved with success the many and varied perils of the German air, had completed their task of destruction deep inside Germany, were killed or maimed as they touched down inside their own airfields, defeated by the Demon Fog. As the stubbornly steady figures were laid before him week by week, Churchill grew more and more insistent that something *must* be done about them. The stream of urgent minutes and instructions increased.

Spurred on by his insistence, the experts worked all over again on various schemes, but had, in the end, to

admit that they had failed. Fog continued to claim its victims, the casualty lists remained long.

Never a man who took kindly to the word "cannot," whether applied to himself or to others, the Premier, relying on the view of "The Proff" that the thing could be done, pressed the bell-push on the big table of the Cabinet Room and dictated a "Most Secret" memorandum, addressed to a young Conservative Minister who had so far taken no part in the research work on fog dissipation. The memorandum was directed to Mr. Geoffrey Lloyd, Secretary for Petroleum and head of the secret Petroleum Warfare Department, a brilliant young man whose persistence had just produced a flame-throwing weapon which was later to have a decisive effect on the progress of the war. To this man who had perfected one of the most lethal of the war's "secret weapons," Churchill sent, on September 26, 1942, a directive to find some means of dissipating fog at aerodromes, so that aircraft could land safely. It told Mr. Lloyd to put experiments in hand at once, and to give them every support and urgency.

Three sentences, typed in the middle of a quarto sheet of paper. The P.M. read it through, wrote his initials—"W. S. C."—in red ink, as he always did, on the bottom, and sent it to Mr. Lloyd.

Reading the three sentences, and knowing something of the experiments that had gone on—and their results—Lloyd sent for his experts, headed by General Sir Donald Banks, chief of the Petroleum Warfare Department. Together, they waded through the problems, found themselves wondering on what "The Proff" based his belief that the thing could be done.

But Lloyd was used to these brief, blunt, peremptory directives. Most Ministers who played their part in the inner circle of the conduct of the war were used to them. It was not much use reporting back that the thing could not be done. So he got to work with his experts again. Eagerly they looked over the highly technical reports on the experiments already made, tried to find some flaw, some error of reasoning, some weak link in the chain of trial and error.

There was none. The logic and reasoning seemed faultless. All seemed perfect—failure. The problem of dispersing fog was apparently insoluble.

Surveying the dead end at which they had arrived, Mr. Lloyd and his technical advisers decided that nothing could be lost, even if nothing were gained, by approaching the whole thing from a new and hitherto untried angle. But this was no simple matter, for some of the most notable scientists in the land had been engaged in the earlier experiments, and had seemingly left nothing to chance.

Hot air and fog, reasoned the experts, cannot live together. Yes, but that had been the basis of *all* the experiments. And, anyway, how could the air be made hot when Nature decreed that it should be cold? But *that*, clearly, was the solution, to raise the temperature of the air so that the fog would be driven away. To create summer in the midst of winter.

Meanwhile, the seasons were advancing. The Prime Minister had called for speed in the experiments, but day and night work had, so far, produced no results. Somehow, the air must be heated, in wide bands, and thick bands at that, so that the fog might be cleared, to make a lane of safety for incoming and outgoing aeroplanes.

To heat a patch of the air was a comparatively simple matter. Workmen made a coke-brazier 1,000 yards long, a thing like an enormous trough, filled with burning coke. Another, of similar size, was made to burn petroleum. They certainly warmed the air—but they emitted a fog of smoke even more intense than the fog they sought to dispel! But, to the eager watchers, it was clear that the natural fog *was* dispelled by the apparatus, even though it was replaced by an artificial one. So they were on the right lines, it seemed.

In the secrecy of a disused water reservoir near London, the Minister and his experts, in dungarees, worked at their experiments. Clouds of smoke billowed across the nearby town, and set rumour's tongue wagging; but the secret was kept.

Slowly a method of making petroleum give off heat without at the same time giving off smoke was worked

out. Down to the reservoir again hurried the excited party, rubbing their hands in eager anticipation as a fog drifted over. The fires were lighted again. This time, there was no smoke, and gradually it was seen that the heat was driving away the worst of the fog. But there was a long way to go. No aircraft could land or take off in the fog that stayed so persistently. The problem was to project, or spread, the heat over a wide area—an area wide enough to let a plane sweep in and land, or run along and take off.

For a long time, so near their goal, and yet so far off, the experts worked on new experiments, went yet again over old ones.

Now and again, as reports of the experiments were sent to him, Churchill dropped encouraging little notes—"Good! Press on," or "Excellent. I will give it a push! Carry on"—each bearing his initials in the familiar red ink.

The whole thing, of course, was in the Most Secret category—or "Top Secret" as it is called nowadays. It was, moreover, a military operation, and, as such, had to have a code name.

So FIDO was born. "Fog Investigation Dispersal Operation."

Many times the experts despaired of the life of the sickly animal. For days and weeks they toiled in laboratory and workshops, eventually producing a weird-looking set of apparatus like great egg-cups at strange angles, which emitted flames and a terrifying heat. The whole contraption would have rejoiced the heart of a Jules Verne and made Heath Robinson envious, but it *might* work, and that was all that mattered.

Believing in Lord Fisher's maxim that experiments should be full-scale—"twelve inches to the foot," as he put it—Geoffrey Lloyd ordered a full-scale fog-disperser and borrowed a full-sized airfield, one in constant use by the Pathfinders, on which to make the great test. The airfield at Graveley, in the middle of England, was chosen, mainly because it had the somewhat unenviable reputation of possessing the best and blackest fogs in Britain.

All that was needed now was a nice, thick fog, such as



those which seemed at all other times perpetually to enshroud the airfield. It was April, 1943, and there should, as the experts pointed out hopefully, be no shortage of fogs.

But the weather was perfect. Not the smallest of mists marred the calm beauty of the English countryside. By day and by night, the skies were clear and bright. Aircraft came and went in serene safety, touched down in the depth of the English night with the easy nonchalance appropriate to the South Seas. Never so much as a wisp of fog for days.

The experts tore their hair, almost prayed for fog. The meteorologists were appealed to, could offer no comforting forecast of foul weather. Black despair descended on Fido's eager parents. The days passed. Then the weeks. Then the months. Four precious months. The weather was ideal for all except the waiting fog-dispersers.

Sitting, dejected and despondent, in the officers' mess, at 5 o'clock on the morning of July 17, 1943, Geoffrey Lloyd and his experts were brought to their feet by the abrupt arrival of an R.A.F. officer, who, his eyes shining with excitement and gratification, dashed in and panted out the one magic word:

*"Fog!"*

Hardly able to contain their excitement, the experts trooped out on to the airfield, and there, sure enough, was a fog of truly pea-soup opaqueness. They fairly ran to the edge of the field, where their precious Fido stood on guard. Graham Bell could not have been more wrought up or anxious as he switched on the first telephone than were those experts as they pulled switches, worked dials, adjusted this and that . . . and watched the fog.

For a long time, as it seemed, nothing at all happened. Was it failure again? Had all the experiments, all the waiting, been in vain?

Then, slowly, like a cinema-machine being adjusted and focused, the scene cleared a little . . . then a lot. The fog went from the airfield. They could see the runway—and the sky. It was seven minutes since Fido had been switched on.

Was it triumph? Or a fluke?

Almost fearfully, the experts switched off—having first watched a plane take off in the patch of clear air. As the fires cooled, the fog slowly returned, the runway disappeared again in the murk. Scientific experts are a sceptical, indeed a pessimistic lot, and it was unanimously decided that the whole thing was no more than a fortunate coincidence. But, to confirm their pessimism, the machine was switched on once more.

The fires blazed up. And the fog went.

So long is the Arm of Coincidence, so certain must the scientist be of his facts before he throws his hat in the air (or, even more important, sends an optimistic report to the Prime Minister!) that even this second test was not taken at its face value. On and off, many times, the apparatus was switched, and the fog came and went, went and came, in step with Fido.

The experts and Mr. Lloyd looked at each other in silence, wondering whether Coincidence's long arm could stretch so far. As they hesitated, the fog crept in again, thicker than ever, enveloping the field in smoky darkness, blotting out the sky. Half-fearfully, they pulled the switches once more. "This time decides!" they said.

The fog did not show any sign of thinning. So it *was* coincidence! Then, slowly and quite definitely, it rolled away from the runway, while all around remained enveloped in its dark cloak. Yes, this was good enough. Fido was a success!

That night, Mr. Lloyd was able to report to the Prime Minister that success had been achieved. Days and nights of worrying experiments, tests with all likely—and many unlikely—schemes had at long last brought success. The machines had to generate as much thermal power as the output of a great power-station, *but they could do it.*

Soon other airfields had Fido to protect them, and the casualty lists that had so distressed the Cabinet showed a big decrease. It is no exaggeration to say that already tens of thousands of British and Allied airmen owe their lives to those experiments—and to that three-sentence minute from "W. S. C. to Mr. Geoffrey Lloyd." From the success

of the weary experiments had sprung something that now means greater safety to all airmen.

Fido, in fact, has left many a British and Allied home circle happy and complete, which might otherwise have had to give a living sacrifice to the Demon Fog. And, in years to come, many a civilian air-passenger, taking a business or holiday trip, will have cause (if only he knows, or remembers) to bless Mr. Churchill for his peremptory memorandum and his faith that obstacles could be overcome, Mr. Lloyd and his experts for their experiments and eventual triumph, and Fido for his tireless work in chasing away the Airman's Bogy, fog.

Not for the first time, the urgency of war had produced something which will be of lasting benefit to mankind.

When all was over, and Fido was working, driving away the autumn and winter fogs that might have spelled disaster for so many brave men, Winston sent a single-sentence memorandum of congratulation to all concerned. They felt themselves amply rewarded.

But even more, perhaps, they treasure a memory. The memory is of a circling ambulance-plane, carrying wounded men from the battlefield in a black fog, waiting—not in vain—for Fido to clear the path to safety and skilled attention.

## CHAPTER THE TENTH

### WELL-CHOSEN WORDS

THE war was not standing still. While that critical, crucial Battle of Britain was being fought in the skies over our tight little island, events were moving swiftly elsewhere. Swiftly, and by no means always favourably to us and our well-wishers.

It was impossible for the Government to concentrate on winning the Battle of Britain on which, as all the world admitted, everything else depended. It was of no use, as

Churchill constantly reminded his colleagues, winning the Battle of Britain if we lost Egypt. Nor was it any use winning the Battle of Egypt if we lost the Battle of Britain.

All the time that fierce struggle went on between the claims of one battlefield and another. We had far too few men. We had far too few guns, tanks, aeroplanes, shells, bullets. As a War Cabinet Minister put it to me at the time: "The only thing we have plenty of is the determination to win through to victory." And who shall say that that was not the most valuable munition of war we could have had at the time—or, indeed, at any time? But patriotism was not enough. Patriotism could not, by itself, stand up to German tanks and well-armed soldiers. If the invasion came—and the military experts, at that time, thought it more than likely—stout hearts would not stand for long against stout tanks. Britain would, in truth, have fought in the streets, on the beaches, in the hills, on the airfields, but the end would have been the same, without adequate arms. And that jest of Winston's about having to use "choppers" to defend our land was perilously, tragically, near the truth.

Sometime, somebody who knows all the facts will write the story of the Battle of the Factories that raged all that desperate year, 1940, and in 1941, 1942, 1943, to ease up only slightly in 1944 and 1945. It is a story as heroic and full of drama as any in the history of the world.

Churchill went about the country, visiting factories, making speeches, offering words of congratulation to tired workers, harassed managements, generally putting "pep" into everybody. From a factory making tanks he would hurry to a Tank Corps depot, there to impress on all the great need for careful conservation of the little we had, full appreciation of the efforts of the workers who were making the machines. Back to a factory he would hurry, to impress on the workers the need for more arms for the soldiers he had just addressed. He kept things going in the rhythm, and with the enthusiasm, so essential in those dark days. He kept a cheerful, yet determined, manner. None knew that, all the time, anxiety was

gnawing at the hearts of the members of the War Cabinet. There are many things in war better kept secret—at the time.

These men at the top had to bear a crushing burden of informed anxiety. They knew just how shattering had been the bombing of places like Rotterdam, where 30,000 people were killed, another 20,000 severely wounded, in one day's smashing raid by the Nazi planes. They knew that a raid like that, visited on a few key towns in Britain, might slow up disastrously the flow of munitions. They knew that the slowing up of the flow of munitions might mean that we were defenceless, or not strong enough, to stand up against a sudden and determined invasion of Britain. They knew that the Nazis were massing invasion barges all along the coasts nearest to our land. They knew that the strength of the German Army was immense, that all the countries of Europe were aiding, as slaves or willing partners, in the production of arms, the provision of raw materials, for the all-conquering German Army.

And, knowing all this, they had to be "grim and gay" as Churchill put it, in a memorable phrase. Grim and gay—on the brink of disaster! All the time, those other fronts had to be looked after, catered for, their integrity planned and maintained.

All the time, that haunting thought that we were alone in the world, in opposition to the German Juggernaut.

Not until distance has given us proper perspective in our picture of those times shall we be able adequately to assess the value of the services of Winston Churchill—and of his Ministers—in those troubled times. But nobody who knows the facts will dispute that the speeches and the public appearances he made were perhaps the most important of all the weapons we had. For his speeches were not confined, in their effects, to Britain. They reached out to the United States of America, whose people were watching with anxious solicitude the fate of Great Britain. And they produced a flood of arms and food and other supplies, without which, in spite of all, Britain might have perished.

They reached out to Germany, where, there is good

reason to believe, they finally decided Hitler and his Generals not to make the invasion attempt—just then.

They reached out to the conquered lands of Europe and gave new hope to the peoples under Hitler's grinding heel. Secret agents made sure that the people of these lands knew what Churchill had said. His speeches were read or heard in caves and out-of-the-way places as eagerly as they were in Britain's homes, in the distant towns of the United States.

It is no exaggeration to say—adapting the immortal phrase he applied to the gallant fellows of the Royal Air Force—that never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to one man.

The Battle of Britain raged; The Few fought on, with increasing success. Nearly 2,500 Nazi planes were destroyed for the loss of 733 R.A.F. But we could ill afford such losses. On five separate days, more than 100 German planes a day were shot down. The civilian casualties mounted—three, four, five and six thousand killed each month, eight, nine and ten thousand severely injured.

Churchill dropped a word of thanks to the Air Raid Precautions workers, sweating and bleeding in the midst of the chaos of bomb damage, risking their lives and limbs hour after hour. The A.R.P. workers were rejuvenated. The National Fire Service, weary and dispirited by long hours of fire-fighting and rescue work, were handed a commendation by the Prime Minister. The Service tackled its tasks with redoubled vigour and determination. The people of the bombed towns were told how the whole free world admired their fortitude under fire. They put their hats at a rakish angle, squared their shoulders proudly, and carried on.

This master of forceful, direct, often colloquial, English had no time for the stilted language of officialdom. In the midst of the stresses and anxieties of 1940, he sent to all Departments in Whitehall a memorandum ordering the use of plain, simple English in official documents. Brevity and simplicity, in place of officialese and jargon, he commanded, short and crisp paragraphs; "let us not shrink

from the short, expressive phrase, even if it is conversational."

Two stories of his campaign against officialese delighted what are called "political circles" in those days when delight was a rare commodity.

One concerned a high Minister whose style was, to put it mildly, a little pompous. He sent Winston a memorandum on some highly important matter, which the Prime Minister read through with growing impatience. Then, seizing a sheet of minute-paper, he wrote on it in red ink, attached it to the memorandum and sent it back to its author.

And the astonished Minister (so the story ran) read this, in the clear, flowing hand of the Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury, and Minister of Defence: "This is an example of bastard and stilted English, *up with which I will not put!* W. S. C."

The other story concerned a Minister whose style is certainly not pompous, but whose speeches are apt to err on the side of carefulness of statement. He sent the Prime Minister the notes of a speech he proposed to make in the country, for perusal and approval. Winston waded through them with patience and, pinning them together, looked up at a secretary with the dry comment: "This appears to contain every cliché known to the English language—except 'Please adjust your dress before leaving.'"

One touch of old-worldliness Churchill allows himself in writing official documents: the use of the word "*pray*" when most people would write "*please*." "Pray let me have a report, on a single sheet of paper" is a favourite phrase of his.

He also found time to circulate a memorandum to heads of Departments sternly ordering that milk bottles were not to be left outside the door of a room near his War Room in a Whitehall building! What had happened was that the Department's Home Guard, whose guardroom was next door to the Premier's room, had been in the habit of leaving their empty milk bottles in the corridor to be collected.

One night, called hurriedly to the War Room, and



A light from a French dockyard worker Chubourg, 1944





AT THE YALTA CONFERENCE, FEBRUARY, 1945  
Churchill and Stalin shake hands, while Roosevelt smiles approval.

wearing only pyjamas, a dressing-gown and slippers, Churchill kicked over a number of bottles, which rolled all over the corridor. Picking up several of them, he hurled them angrily against the wall, and soon afterwards dictated his ultimatum to the offenders. The spectacle of the Head of the Government furiously—and not silently—pursuing the rolling bottles was, as one who was present told me, a "sight for sore eyes."

On another occasion, the Home Guard of a Government Department was drilling on the Horse Guards' Parade, under a sergeant-major whose voice was more penetrating than musical. Getting up from his chair at the Cabinet table, Winston crossed to the window, looked out for a moment, then summoned a secretary.

"Ask that man to come in to see me!"

The flustered sergeant-major—he was a uniformed messenger in "private life"—was ushered in, visions of the O.B.E. doubtless floating before his eyes. Saluting smartly, he waited. Winston looked at him in silence for a moment.

"Look, my friend," he said, "*I know you've got to make yourself heard. I appreciate the good work you are doing. I can see you are efficient. But, for heaven's sake—don't make such an infernal noise about it! Good evening!*"

Churchill never encouraged the sort of legend that gathered about Hitler and Mussolini in their sycophant-ruled days. He was "human" and proud of it. He did not mind if people knew he lost his temper, was impatient, rude to those who were less than competent. Indeed, more than once, he "treated rough" the House of Commons itself, and the House agreed that it had deserved it. After long years of observation, I am convinced that the House of Commons is the one thing in the world that Churchill almost fears. On one occasion, when the Press had forecast for him a chilly reception, I saw him standing outside the door of the Chamber for a couple of minutes, showing every sign of acute nervousness. As a matter of fact, when he did go in, there was a roar of cheers, and he smiled again. But it was an interesting glimpse of the human side of the man who stood, unflinching, before the worst

the Axis could do, who faced without a qualm a whole world in arms.

"I am," he once said, "a child of the House of Commons, its servant. All that I am, I owe to the House of Commons, to the people."

And that he sincerely means.

But that did not prevent him, on occasions, from showing the House who was "master." When, at the height of the war's crisis, some of the less responsible critics began a campaign which he regarded as a particularly "niggling" one, he determined to make them "come to heel." Entering the House with grim face, he merely scowled in reply to the roar of placatory cheers his appearance raised. He sat down on the Treasury Bench in stony silence, folded his arms, sat looking straight before him, answered half a dozen questions with a snappy monosyllable, got up and strode out.

The effect was extraordinary. The critics looked at each other in consternation, like lovers who had offended their best girls. They did not quite know what to make of this silent Winston. The Winston who lashed out and gave them a verbal thrashing they knew and could understand, and, little as they liked the process, they could take it. But a Winston silent and morose—a Winston who was "sending them to Coventry"—they found it impossible to deal with.

So they thought again on their criticisms, found that they were not so well-founded as they had thought, and dropped them.

I often wonder what they would have thought—and done—if they had seen the Prime Minister keep on his mask of grim bad-temper until he was safely just out of sight, and then drop it abruptly, roar with laughter and exclaim: "*That stirred 'em up! That stirred 'em up!*"

He does not keep all his strategy for the battlefield.

All through those troubled times—and none but the Ministers responsible for our affairs can know just *how* troubled they were—the Government was faced with this problem:

It is vital to win the Battle of Britain. If that is lost,

*all* is lost. It will be useless to try to stem the German flood if Britain falls. But, if the war is to be won, and not merely brought to a stalemate end, if we are to have victory and not merely an avoidance of defeat, then the other fronts must be looked after and upheld. We must, in the midst of the struggle for life, make our full preparations for winning the long-range victory which is our aim.

The conditions for such a frame of mind could hardly have been less favourable.

Ministers spent many a worried hour in the chart-rooms where the coloured graphs showed the shipping losses. Up and up went the columns, telling the story of more ships sunk, more gallant seamen lost, more precious cargoes that would never reach port.

And the Italians had, at last, got possession of their "Italian Lake," the Mediterranean, so that we had to send almost everything—everything that could not be packed into an aeroplane—round by the Cape, thousands of miles round, taking weeks instead of days.

We were never allowed to forget that the Germans occupied Norway, and that that country provided some invaluable and dangerous ports for their raiding ships.

One night in May, 1941, the Admiralty wireless flashed the news that the German battleship *Bismarck* had got out, attended by the *Prinz Eugen*, and was at large in the Atlantic. This was serious—the two powerful surface raiders, in addition to the many U-boats, might do untold harm to the already severely harassed Allied shipping. Swift action was called for.

The German move was reported to Churchill, who went at once to the map-lung Admiralty War Room to work with A. V. Alexander, the First Lord, on the counter-plans. Next day, H.M.S. *Hood* and H.M.S. *Prince of Wales*, told by radio to look out for the German ships, flashed the news that they had made contact. There was a sharp battle, and *Hood* went down. The *Bismarck* was damaged, but still swift.

Back to the Admiralty this news, too, was flashed, and the two Ministers planned a great concentration of sea

and air power for the kill. The great battleships *King George V* and *Rodney* were hurried to the scene. Aircraft-carriers came from all directions.

I remember the relish with which Churchill told the story to the House of Commons—sitting in Church House—while the pursuit still went on. He told the whole story, ending with an announcement that the battle continued.

The House turned to other business, and Winston was talking quietly to the Ministers near him when Commander Rex Fletcher (now Lord Winster) hurried in with a small slip of paper in his hand. This was handed to the Prime Minister, who jumped up impetuously, interrupting the Member addressing the House. Startled Members cried "Order!" but Winston stood his ground.

The row went on, so Winston, rising with a great show of ceremony, and looking expectantly at the Speaker, said, tentatively: "I don't know whether I may venture, with great respect . . ."

The House quietened a little, and he added: "... to intervene for a moment?"

The House was silent, and, pulling his glasses to the end of his nose and glancing at the small piece of paper in his hand, he ended, with tantalizing deliberation: "I—I have just received the news that—er—the—er—*Bismarck* is—SUNK!"

The German ship had gone down to the guns and torpedoes of H.M.S. *Dorsetshire*, a cruiser, after a fine piece of co-operation with aircraft and other ships.

The years 1940 and 1941 were years calling for long-sighted and dangerous decisions. We had so pitifully little of anything to spare in this country that it needed many Cabinet meetings and conferences of Ministers to make the fateful decision whether to send reinforcements of men and materials to the Middle East, to ensure that we had a chance of standing up against the well-armed and well-supplied Italians and their German "stiffening."

The military experts made their "appreciations" of the position and the chances of success and failure. The statisticians got out their graphs and tables. The authorities on this and that presented their reports and memoranda.

The Cabinet talked it over, looked at the pros and cons. In the end it was left to the Minister of Defence himself to make the final decision.

What a crushing burden that must have been! Here was the nation struggling for its life against overwhelming odds—just how overwhelming none knew better than he. Here was a nation threatened with invasion—and bitterly ill-equipped to withstand it. Here was a nation with far too few of everything—except stout hearts, and stout hearts cannot sinash tanks or bring down bombers. Yet, if the Germans conquered North Africa, all was lost! Yes, but if Britain fell, all was lost, too! So ran the arguments and counter-arguments. Churchill took all the reports and memoranda and graphs and assessments into a room, gave orders that he was not to be disturbed, and, alone, thought the matter out.

This, surely, must have been one of the most dreadful decisions any man was ever called on to make. He might be sending a large part of our scanty arms to the bottom of the ravenous ocean. He might be sending away from our vulnerable shores the very guns and men and armaments that would make all the difference between success and failure when the invader came. Worst of all, he might be sending to their deaths gallant men—not just units in a fighting force, but men, husbands, fathers, sons, brothers—on an errand that might well end in failure, the loss of North Africa *and* the British Isles.

They say Churchill looked a haggard man as he came out of his room after making the fateful decision on that mass of soulless papers. But he gave calm and precise orders: The reinforcements asked for were to go. The forces in North Africa were to have the cream of our men and supplies. They were to be convoyed on the vast journey round by the Cape, every mile of it a peril.

The orders were put into effect immediately.

"Pray God," said Churchill quietly, "it's the right decision."

That decision was, undoubtedly, one of the major turning points of the war, for the arrival of those reinforcements, providentially in the nick of time, just turned the

scale and enabled General Wavell to act daringly, as a General can who knows he has a few spares in hand, who does not have carefully to eke out ammunition for fear the supply will fail.

Never was a daring decision so swiftly fruitful. But if the giant convoys had been sunk, if the troops and supplies had never reached their far-distant destination, it might well have been a turning point in the war, but against us.

None but the military and political high-ups knew (for the security silence was necessarily complete) what a Gethsemane Winston Churchill had passed through before the fateful decision was made. The world only knew that a daring decision had been made, that the troops had arrived, like the sheriff's posse on the film, in the very second they were most needed, and that a battle had been won that might not have been.

Of that quiet figure sitting, head in hand, at the table in the Cabinet Room of 10, Downing Street, they knew nothing. The loneliness of high office is very great.

The Italians might be fleeing like frightened rabbits before our troops in North Africa, but Mussolini was determined to show the world that his "Empire" was not decadent, that it had fight in it yet. Greece lay conveniently near. So, massing his forces, he struck at Greece.

That action was to lead to a very difficult time for Winston Churchill, and to many more anxious decisions by him.

## CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH

### THINGS GO WRONG

WINSTON CHURCHILL's heart has always been in the Royal Navy. Great as is his faith in the Army and the Royal Air Force, he regards the Navy as "his" Service. It was with delight, therefore, that he was able to announce two fierce blows at the naval forces of "this wicked man, this whipped jackal, Mussolini."

The first was when units of the Fleet Air Arm smashed Italian naval ships hiding in the great harbour at Taranto. Three battleships, two cruisers and two fleet auxiliaries were put out of action for months.

The second, a few months later, was the Battle of Cape Matapan, in which three heavy Italian cruisers, a large destroyer and a smaller one were sunk, without loss or damage to the British force.

But in the meantime Britain had heard with a shudder that things were going wrong in North Africa, scene, only a few months earlier, of resounding victories. The Germans, this time, attacked, with the legendary Rommel in command, and we had to fall back, giving up place after place we had captured. While all this bad news was flowing in—and in the general atmosphere of depression it seemed worse than it was—the Germans joined the Italians in attacking Greece.

It was at once decided that the national honour required that Britain should aid that gallant little nation in the fight against hopeless odds. Nearly 60,000 troops were detached from Wavell's force in North Africa and sent to Greece under Sir Henry Maitland Wilson. Although the decision was a difficult one to make, it was made without hesitation.

But the forces were not big enough to make any great difference against the much bigger and far more easily supplied German and Italian forces, and disaster followed disaster. German air-borne forces landed in the island of Crete, capturing the airfield and forcing the British to withdraw. Everything went wrong in Greece. The British were forced to withdraw—rather less than a month after they had gone there to aid the stricken and hard-pressed Greeks. It was another "Dunkirk," and British forces were again in retreat.

There were murmurs and mutterings against Churchill, whose stock fell heavily. He felt this loss of confidence keenly, and determined to face up to it in Parliament as soon as he could. His critics left nothing to chance. The most intense whispering campaign of recent British political life was launched against him. I was seriously told that



he had decided on the Greek campaign "entirely off his own bat," and simply because he could not stand the idea of a war going on without his being in it! The confidence many M.P.s felt in him was severely strained. His enemies proclaimed that this was the end of him, that "the Churchill bubble had been pricked!"

Churchill angrily prepared a speech, stormed over to the House of Commons, determined to face his critics and rout them. It was, I remember, an angry, sullen debate. Churchill spoke grimly, bitingly, almost sulkily, with none of his usual flashes of wit. He made a tremendous case for the action his Government had taken, listened with unconcealed anger and impatience to the criticisms that came from many parts of the House. But he survived.

Poor little Greece was overrun. Athens was occupied by the Germans.

People commented that Churchill looked worried. He was—for he knew something that was as yet hidden from the general public. He knew that the Germans were busily picking a quarrel with the Russians, with whom they had signed a pact of friendship in 1939. And he knew that, if Russia went down, those vast resources of raw material in Russia would be at the disposal of the Germans. And then . . . Alone Britain would have to face a triumphant Germany, backed by all the resources of Europe.

For in those days the greatest military experts would have given very little for the chances of the Russian armed forces when pitted against the strong, disciplined, well-led Germans. They could not see into the future, and to them it seemed certain beyond doubt that the Germans would get a walk-over.

Churchill had, months before, sent to Marshal Stalin, through Sir Stafford Cripps, our Ambassador, a personal letter, written in his own hand, appealing to him to beware of Germany, warning him that Hitler was his enemy, that the signing of the friendship pact was a piece of treachery. Stalin had no great faith in Hitler's word, but he was of opinion that it would more conveniently be broken two years later—in 1943, not in 1941. All plans

were being made to meet the assault when it came—in 1943—after Hitler had conquered Britain. It was in vain that Churchill argued that the blow would come much earlier.

The German Government suddenly “turned on the heat,” picked its quarrel, swooped on a Saturday night into Russia.

Then Churchill had to make another fateful decision, this time more political than military in character. The Soviet Government’s popularity in this country was at its lowest in those days. Many blamed Stalin for having signed a pact with Hitler in 1939; many more blamed him for having moved into Poland when that country was fighting for life against the raging Germans. The political system in Russia bred dislike and distrust among big classes of people in Britain. And, on top of all this, Russia was probably (so all the experts thought) a military liability. She would need to be bolstered up. More British troops, more precious armaments, so sorely needed for the defence of Britain and the holding of the North Africa front, would have to go to the aid of Russia, who had done nothing for us, who had, indeed, let us down.

Thus ran the arguments. High officials estimated that the conquest of Russia by the Germans would be completed in weeks. (The first treacherous assault seemed to support their gloomy view; place after place fell easily to the advancing Germans.)

It was in this atmosphere that Churchill had to make what was perhaps—almost certainly—the most difficult political decision he was called on to make in the whole course of the war. He was at Chequers when the news of the German attack came. He was roused—it was 6.30 in the morning—to be told the news, and, sitting up in bed, he made up his mind to broadcast, announcing the decision to range Britain’s strength and resources behind Russia in her fight against the Nazis.

Those close to him went about all day shaking their heads doubtfully, saying he had made a great mistake, that the “country would not stand for it,” and that we

were merely adding another liability to our already dangerously long list. It is not too much to say that, that Sunday morning, Winston Churchill took his political life in his hands. If his decision had gone wrong, on top of the other stresses and troubles from which the nation was then suffering, there would have been a political crisis of the first magnitude.

"I *know* I am right!" was his reply to all suggestions that he should wait and see how things went before committing himself. "I shall broadcast to-night!"

He did. It was a remarkable broadcast, in which he pledged all the aid of which Britain was capable to Russia, least popular of countries, after Germany. There was nothing half-hearted about it—it was all in, with a vengeance.

"The fool—he's finished himself!" an important politician told me, angrily, on the telephone, a few moments after the broadcast. "The House will tear him to pieces for this!"

But the House, and the country, took the whole thing with remarkable calm. Here, at last, people joked grimly, we had an ally, we were no longer alone. But . . . what an ally! One that would go down like a ninepin before the German drive, one that was a giant liability.

"I don't believe you are right about Russia's weakness," Winston told a friend, "and, even if you are, any country fighting the Nazis must have our support!"

The Russians went on falling back, the Germans went on advancing, over the fantastic spaces of Russia. The murmurs began in the political clubs.

"No one," Churchill had said in his broadcast, "has been a more persistent opponent of Communism than I have been for the last twenty-five years. I will unsay no word that I have spoken about it, but all this fades away before the spectacle which is now unfolding. . . . We must speak out now, at once, without a day's delay. I have to make a declaration. Can you doubt what our policy will be? We have but one aim and but one single irrevocable purpose. We are resolved to destroy Hitler and every vestige of his Nazi regime . . . any man or State who

fight against Nazism will have our aid . . . that is our policy and that is our declaration."

The great industrial centres in Russia fell one after the other.

It was decided to send Russia arms and supplies from our own slender stores. "A friend in need is a friend indeed!" Churchill is said to have replied to someone who questioned this action, and the supplies went. Things might have been very different if those supplies had never got through in those early months.

The flow of lifeblood became a transfusion from the veins of Britain—herself sorely ill—to Russia, struggling for life. It was a gamble on a gamble; a military hazard on a military hazard.

"But," as Churchill never tired of reminding the less courageous, "in war, one has to take big risks to secure big gains. I believe that this is an investment in Victory. I believe the Russians will squeeze the very life out of the Nazis. And I believe that everything we send them will be well used. So send some more!"

It was a daring prophecy, a daring action, in those days.

In these grim times there was one bright ray of hope. President Roosevelt bluntly announced, in September, 1941, that "from now on, if German and Italian vessels enter the waters under U.S. protection, they do so at their own peril!"

The first U.S. merchantmen to enter the combat zone under the new rule went, at the suggestion of Mr. Churchill, in a telephone talk with the President, to Russia, not to Britain. Her need, he felt, was greater—even greater—than ours.

All the time, the Germans were sweeping on in Russia.

It was decided to tighten up still more the working conditions of the people of Britain, to demand still more from them.

Let me here tell, briefly, the story of the war-workers of Britain from the beginning of the war in September, 1939, to the middle of 1944, the peak of production, the month that saw D-Day and the landing on the Continent.

It is best told, as it was told in that thrilling White Paper on Britain's war effort, in figures.

In those years, 722 major naval vessels were completed, 1,386 Mosquito naval craft, 3,636 "other naval vessels." Field, medium and heavy artillery equipments totalled 13,512, heavy anti-aircraft equipments 6,249, and light anti-aircraft equipments 15,324. Machine guns and sub-machine guns totalled 3,729,921 ! Rifles made numbered 2,001,949 ; tanks 25,116 ; wheeled vehicles for the Services 919,111.

Aircraft, almost weekly changing their design in important details, frequently changing fundamentally, had to be turned out in hundreds of thousands, to meet the demands of our Allies as well as to fulfil our own pressing needs. From the factories of the United Kingdom flowed 102,609 planes in those years of sweat and toil. Ten thousand and eighteen heavy bombers, 17,702 medium and light bombers, which were between them to pound the life out of Germany, found their way from the factories to the airfields, and the workers found time to make 38,025 fighters as well.

Delivering the goods was not always easy. The Germans had possession of Norway and all the coastline of Europe, and they could send out planes and U-boats to intercept our convoys. The men of the Merchant Navy were consulted, and agreed to a daring plan to give effect to their gallant motto : "The cargoes must get through !" It was decided that British warships—the few which had to guard the many—should convoy the merchantmen for a certain distance and that then the loaded cargo-ships should make a dash for it, hoping to get to their destination safely ! Many a brave man died on that desperate run, but nine out of ten of the ships got through, often battered and limping, to the Russian ports with their cargoes of the raw stuff of Victory.

The ships were loaded to an extent that would have made a peace-time captain shudder ; they travelled at a speed that would have made their designers gasp ; they went through hardships of climate and attack that would have daunted men less courageous than the men of the

British Merchant Navy. But they Got There, and that was all that mattered in those days.

"Russia must have the goods!" was the cry up and down the land, from the Prime Minister down to the boy who carried the tea-cans to the perspiring, hollow-eyed men and women at the lathes and benches.

The efforts of the men and women in the factories, the bravery and enterprise of the Merchant Navy, richly deserve, and doubtless will have, a brightly glowing page to themselves in the history of those days.

Churchill bobbed up here and there, his cigar in his mouth, his chin jutting, his voice urging everybody on to even greater efforts.

It needed courage to ask men and women working as were those men and women of the factories in 1941 to do more. With nerves tautened to breaking-point, they might well have turned on their taskmaster. But they took it from Winston, and forced themselves to make a still greater effort.

"If anybody else had asked me to work harder than I am," a weary-eyed man in a factory said to me as he watched Churchill's stumpy figure retreating along the aisle of machinery, "I'd a' bloody well knocked his block off! But Winnie—well, he's always working himself, and he's a right to ask us to do the same!"

The sound of the wheels rose to a shrill scream. Britain was getting into gear.

## CHAPTER THE TWELFTH

### KEEPING UP MORALE

HISTORIANS will argue, perhaps, to the end of time, about the "invasion of Britain by Germany." It was rumoured in 1940 that the invasion had been attempted, and there were many who "knew men who had seen the charred bodies of German soldiers who had taken part in the

attempt but had perished in the sea of flame the Royal Air Force had hurled against the massed invasion barges."

But, in fact, there was never any actual attempt to invade, although there was good ground for the belief that an invasion was to be attempted—and the wise ones who (well after the event) decided that it had never been anything but a scare were wrong. Invasion barges were massed in creeks and estuaries all down the coast of Europe. German troops were seen learning how to clamber up the cliffs opposite the cliffs of Britain. Masses of troops were moved to places within easy reach of Britain's shores.

One part of the invasion plan *was* put into effect, with full fury: the blitz on Britain. There is no doubt that it was intended to shatter Britain's communications and weaken the will to resist, to smash our war factories and induce a "surrender complex," so that, when the German land forces came, they should find things comparatively easy.

So, as the blitz swept up to its climax, those at the head of affairs, and Winston Churchill, as Minister of Defence, most of all, had all the time the knowledge that the invasion might come, just when we were most battered and staggering, just when we had so little with which to defend ourselves. For he *knew* what we had in our armouries; he did not have to guess. He knew we had less than 100 guns, a score of tanks, to defend the whole of Britain. He knew that the armed men we possessed would have to defend a mile of the coast for every forty-five men. And he knew—for our much-maligned Secret Service was very effective, and we knew a lot about the enemy—that the Germans were loaded with arms, and even more important, had men to use them.

In the midst of the tenseness of the invasion threat, Churchill called together his military advisers, told them to make their plans complete for the coming invasion—*of the Continent!* It was a typical piece of Churchill "nerve."

It was essential, all the time, to keep up that most mysterious and unruly force, "public morale." Churchill, in the midst of his preoccupations and worries and planning, had to talk . . . and talk. For by now his voice was

familiar to the public, his words eagerly read as they were printed in full in the severely cut newspapers.

A nation with taut nerves is a touchy thing. A word out of place, a joke when seriousness is called for, a serious word when the people want a joke, and untold damage may be done. If anything had been allowed to happen then to weaken the nation's confidence in Winston Churchill, we might not have got through. Rightly or wrongly, the people regarded him as the nation's sheet anchor. Anyone who will dispute that statement must know little of the events and the atmosphere of those days. And so he had to go around with a smile, when the dangers of invasion were gnawing at his heart ; with a confident joke when he knew that our armoury was empty, that the best of our arms lay in the German armouries, collected from the beaches of Dunkirk.

As the bombs rained down on London, he exclaimed with a grin : "It would take ten years at the present rate for half the houses of London to be demolished. After that, of course,—progress would be much slower !"

It was a "crack" that might easily have gone wrong. As it was, men poked each other in the ribs, roared with laughter, and proclaimed him "a one."

Every move the enemy made was carefully studied, reported on, placed in the files, those Most Secret files that were kept in the locked, heavily guarded rooms of the War Cabinet offices.

When the history of our conquest of Europe, and the shattering fall of the Germans can be written in full, and when the events and plans of those days when Britain stood on the verge of invasion are revealed, it will be found that many of the plans the warmongers of Germany made for the invasion of Britain were, years later, turned against them. Churchill, like a true student of warfare, is not too proud to learn from his adversaries.

He learned many things in those perilous days.



## CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH

## "A FORMER NAVAL PERSON"

ONE hot afternoon in July, 1941, officials in Downing Street wore a worried expression, and darted from one room to another as if eager to avoid visitors. Secretaries politely regretted they could make no appointment for the Prime Minister for an unspecified time, explaining that the war situation was taking all his time.

Those in closer contact with "official circles" were solemnly assured, with a wealth of circumstantial detail, that the Premier was off on one of those visits to the home troops he was so fond of. "You know what he's like," officials said with a wink, "will see everything for himself. Blessed marvel, the way he gets about!"

While all the guessing was going on in London, and all the guessing announcements about the Prime Minister's "movements" were coming from the German radio, the object of all the excitement was striding the deck of the great battleship *Prince of Wales*, on his way to a rendezvous with President Roosevelt off Newfoundland.

Roosevelt went to the meeting place in the United States cruiser *Augusta*, and, in the calm beauty of a little bay, the two men talked for days, worked out between them the Atlantic Charter, that document which was to form the basis of many a debate, of many a hope, many a sneer.

But they did far more than that. They cemented a friendship that had had, until then, to live on the scanty food of a single meeting, many years before, and a series of letters exchanged on purely official matters.

As soon as he took office as First Lord of the Admiralty in September, 1939, Churchill received a personal message from Roosevelt, asking him to correspond direct with the head of the United States Government on any matter he chose, particularly naval questions. There was a constant flow of messages to and fro. German spies were everywhere

and it was considered necessary, for "security" purposes, that Winston should have a code name.

So there were frequent mentions in the correspondence of "A Former Naval Person," which must have puzzled a good deal any enemy agent who was fortunate enough to get to know the contents of any of the dispatches. And "A Former Naval Person" became the affectionate nickname by which the President knew the Premier, to the end of his life.

To Churchill, the President became "Frank." The two struck up a strong personal friendship from the moment they met, and it was surely a friendship that will find its place in the story of the world. From it great things grew.

It may be a long time before we know what really happened at that secret meeting in the calm of the Newfoundland bay. I suspect that it was not only that somewhat flowery Atlantic Charter that they talked about for days. I suspect that things more concrete, less idealistic, were talked over, too. But, at that time, Roosevelt was having a trying time with the people in the United States who proclaimed that they "had not raised their sons to be soldiers," the people who swore that their country should never be plunged into war.

Knowing Roosevelt's political difficulties, Churchill had addressed the people of the United States in a broadcast: "Put your confidence in us. Give us your faith and your blessing, and under Providence all will be well. We shall not fail or falter. We shall not weaken or tire. Neither the sudden shock of battle nor the long trials of vigilance or exertion will wear us down. Give us the tools and we will finish the job!"

But it was not the Atlantic Charter that created the excitement over that meeting—nor was it the talks the two men might have had over the provision of "the tools," for none outside the inner circles knew of them. It was the fact that Churchill, in the midst of the perils of war, had ventured out into the Atlantic to the secret meeting-place to sit at a conference table with the head of the Government of our cousin-State over the sea.

To say that it startled the country is an under-statement.

There were mixed feelings of admiration and resentment that he should have taken such risks in the cause of the United Nations, and all for an ideal. There were open complaints that he should have laid himself open to enemy attack, or, worse, capture. But, underneath it all, there was great admiration of a man who, in the midst of all the preoccupations and perils of war, could go out, quietly to talk things over with the leader of another powerful nation.

Even those who complained that Churchill had taken undue risks secretly admired his pluck. And they were cheered, too, by the way the security services had worked—it was a good omen for the future, when we might have great secrets to safeguard about the invasion of the Continent—if that ever happened.

On his way back to Britain, Churchill's warship passed a convoy, and, at his orders, it circled the merchant ships, while the Prime Minister gave them his V-sign. Unfortunately, the sign had a very different signification for the merchantmen—it had not then become so famous—and there was some resentment at an apparent insult, until someone tactfully explained!

His homecoming was like that of a King. Crowds cheered him as he passed through the streets, loudspeakers announced his coming.

The critics who complained that he was taking undue risks knew, of course, nothing of the circumstances of his dramatic trip, a year before, to Tours, in a last-minute effort to persuade the French to hold on, nothing of his grim order to his valet to pack him a loaded pistol.

They knew nothing, either—this is the first time the story has been told—of the fateful choice Mr. Anthony Eden, Churchill's Foreign Secretary, had had to make on a flight to the Far East a few months before.

Eden, with Sir John Dill, then Chief of the Imperial General Staff, in his red tabbed uniform, was flying on an important secret mission when, in the small hours of the morning, he was awakened by a member of the crew, with the message: "The captain would like to see you urgently, sir!"

Hurrying to see the captain, Eden was told bluntly:

"There's not enough —— petrol on board to get us where we want to go! It is a choice between landing in Spain and . . . the drink!"

"If we land in Spain," said Eden, "it means that Sir John Dill will be interned for the duration of the war, because he is in uniform. So I choose the sea—the 'drink'!"

"Right, sir!" answered the captain, nonchalantly, as though the Minister had merely asked to be landed at a different airfield. "We'll carry on as long as we can, and then . . . O.K., sir."

Going back to his bunk, Eden reflected that he had perhaps condemned Dill and the members of the crew to death, when they might have preferred internment, so he called the C.I.G.S., and consulted him.

"For me," said Dill, without hesitation, when the position had been explained to him, "the drink! Internment for the duration is more than I can face."

The verdict of the crew was the same, so the order to crash the plane, rather than bring it down on enemy or neutral soil, stood. For a long time, the engine droned on, but the indicators showed that the petrol supply was getting dangerously low. The sweating crew, by skilful handling, saved a little here and there. The anxious passengers talked social small-talk to keep each other's spirits up, and looked reflectively at the sea far beneath them.

At last, land loomed below. The captain mopped his brow, and swooped down—to make a perfect landing. He had no petrol to spare for the usual circlings of the airfield, and took a chance on getting down safely. It was Gibraltar. The Minister and the C.I.G.S. had been saved from the choice between death and imprisonment.

But, on looking at the petrol tanks, they were bone dry.

#### CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH

### THE END OF THE BEGINNING

ALL the time he was thinking how to defend Britain against a German invasion, Churchill was also thinking

how the Allies could invade the Continent, avenge Dunkirk, and win the war. A stalemate peace, he often said in private, was a defeat for the Allies, a victory for Germany. "You ask what is our aim? I will give it in one word: *Victory!*" he had said.

There was a time when it was fashionable, even in quite high quarters and in all political Parties, to think of the possibility that a negotiated peace with Germany might, in the end, have to be accepted. Churchill was uncompromising in his opposition to any such thoughts, even in the depth of the country's danger.

Bringing his clenched fist crashing down on his desk, he said to a visitor when things looked as black as they could be: "I will beat that fellow Hitler! Peace without victory is unthinkable, for it would be no peace at all. It may be long and difficult, but we must—*we shall*—go on to the end!"

At a time when we stood alone, with the then highly doubtful asset of Soviet Russian co-operation as our only hope, that was a courageous line. Not a few thought it a slightly crazy, an unrealistic line. But while others gave their thoughts to what would happen if we found victory impossible, the Prime Minister gave his to plans for victory.

Night after night, his planning chiefs were called into his closely guarded room, to stay there until dawn, plotting and planning for the day when the tide should be made to turn—when *we* should attack the "*Nazis*" as he always contemptuously called them, when *they* should be on the defensive, when their conquered lands should be taken from them, and when their Fatherland, their "sacred soil," should be overrun by the forces of the British Empire, and any allies that might by then have appeared.

The chances of anything more than armaments and supplies from the United States seemed remote.

Never once did Churchill complain of the attitude of the United States people. "No man," he used to say, "should take on himself the awful responsibility of taking a nation into the incalculable dangers and hazards of war, unless he is convinced that it is the only way."

All the time, the triumphant German Army was tearing into the vitals of Russia. The doubters shook their heads, declared with sorrow or triumph that "Churchill had backed the wrong horse this time." But, whoever tried to convince him that the Russian Army could not last more than a few months—a favoured theory in those days, and one that seemed all too true as defeat after defeat was inflicted on the Soviet forces by the all-devouring German Wehrmacht—he always replied: "They used to say that about *us*, in 1940. *We* are still kicking!"

Quite suddenly, the Russians turned the tables, drove the German forces back in one area. The world awoke to the fact that the great, the invincible, the ever-advancing German Army was—in *retreat*. From our slender store of aeroplanes and bombs, we were smashing at Germany. In six months, in 1941, the Royal Air Force hurled 20,000 tons of bombs on Germany. At the same time, the British forces in North Africa began a push and—to the general surprise—the Germans began to retreat there, too.

The world rubbed its eyes. In the catch phrase of the moment, it said: "What's goin' on here?" and began to take a new interest in the people of the little island to the west of Europe, the little island—and its people—who stood alone.

Over in Japan, the war lords began to look at each other in wonder and to decide that these Democracies must not be given too much rope, or they might hang their would-be executioners, not themselves.

Said Churchill in a broadcast: "We are sure that the character of human society will be shaped by the resolves we take and the deeds we do. We need not bewail the fact that we have been called upon to face such solemn responsibilities. We may be proud, and even rejoice amid our tribulations, that we have been born at this cardinal time for so great an age and so splendid an opportunity for service."

If Britain did not precisely rejoice—for there was little in those grim days about which to rejoice—the nation thrilled with pride at those words. It thrilled as it had done a year earlier when Churchill, as First Lord of the Admiralty, had cried to a Manchester crowd: "Come then,

let us to the task, to the battle, to the toil ! Each to our part, each to our station. Fill the armies, rule the air, pour out the munitions, strangle the U-boat, sweep the mines, plough the land, build the ships, guard the streets, succour the wounded, uplift the downcast and honour the brave. Let us go forward together in all parts of the Empire, in all parts of this island."

Was ever a nation given its battle orders with greater economy of words, with greater clarity—or more inspiringly ?

There was a long, hard and dangerous road before us, still, but—in a phrase Churchill was to use much later—it was perhaps the End of the Beginning, if not yet the beginning of the end.

Our troops in North Africa were to receive great encouragement from the presence among them of a certain Mr. Bullfinch, who hurtled about the desert in a jeep, dashed out to forward posts, made a few "V-signs" with his uplifted fingers, grinned, made a short speech, and was gone in an aroma of cigar-smoke.

But Mr. Bullfinch, who bore a striking resemblance to Mr. Churchill, and who seemed to be treated as one would expect a Prime Minister to be treated, had sterner business than friendly visits to the troops. He spent hours locked in closely guarded rooms with the Chiefs of Staff, and many were the plans made for the defeat of the redoubtable, the almost mythical, Field-Marshal Rommel, who was to die later in France, the victim of a daring R.A.F. man.

Many of Churchill's most vital orders have been given in a very few words. Such was certainly the case with the Directive given by the Prime Minister to General (now Field-Marshal) Sir Harold Alexander, the brilliant Commander-in-Chief, Middle East. Many an instruction to a gardener to cut a lawn has taken more words.

This is how the order ran :

"1. Your prime and main duty will be to take or destroy at the earliest opportunity the German-Italian Army commanded by Field-Marshal Rommel, together with all its supplies and establishments in Egypt and Libya.

"2. You will discharge or cause to be discharged such

other duties as pertain to your Command without prejudice to the task described in paragraph 1, which must be considered paramount in His Majesty's interests.

"WINSTON S. CHURCHILL."

Less than seventy words sufficed to convey to Alexander the order that was to lead directly to the victory that came months later.

And, because it is such a perfect complement to the simplicity of this order, it is worth cutting into the story here the reply Alexander—with the assistance of Montgomery—sent to the Prime Minister in February, 1943:

"Sir: The Orders you gave me on August 15, 1942, have been fulfilled. His Majesty's enemies, together with their impedimenta, have been completely eliminated from Egypt, Cyrenaica, Libya and Tripolitania. I now await your further instructions."

"Well, obviously," said Churchill, as he read this reply, "we shall have to think of something else!"

## CHAPTER THE FIFTEENTH

### ENTER THE SON OF HEAVEN

THERE is a saying to the effect that whom the Gods seek to destroy they first make mad. Such must have been the fate of the Japanese, who, on December 7, 1941, suddenly hurled themselves on the United States of America. The attack came suddenly, without any declaration of war, and while Japanese diplomats were in conference with members of the United States Government about peace and friendship.

Out of the skies over the great United States naval, military and air base of Pearl Harbour roared Japanese aeroplanes, hurling death and destruction on the United States fleet. Out of the skies over Manila, Shanghai, Malaya, Thailand and Hong Kong screeched more Jap bombs and incendiaries. The excited cables carried the



news all over the world. A telephone call from President Roosevelt told the story to Mr. Churchill in London.

In a moment, Churchill had decided to call Parliament together to tell them of the affair and of Britain's intention to declare war on the treacherous Japanese. For many months, the meetings of Parliament had been kept so secret that even the official order-papers bore, not a date but a mysterious "first sitting day after April 1." Even the meeting place was a close official secret. But, faced with this new crisis—for the smashing blow on Pearl Harbour had resulted in enormous damage to the United States fleet—Mr. Churchill ordered that the recall of Parliament be broadcast. So, for the first time in history, the British Parliament was summoned by radio.

Crowding excitedly into the Chamber, Members listened to his brief account of what had happened and cheered Churchill's announcement that war had been declared on Japan. Once more there was about the House that strange feeling of a burden lifted, as there had been in September, 1939. At last, we knew where we stood with Japan, and, even though it added another powerful enemy to the list, most people in Britain felt relieved.

But—there was one great question-mark. Why had Japan hurled herself into the war, just at this moment? Could it be that, inside Japan's carefully guarded, supposedly spy-proof, walls there was a vast war-machine of which we knew little or nothing? Was this to be another shattering crisis for the United Nations? None knew the answers to these questions. But the declaration of war was made without the slightest hesitation. Anyone who attacked our friends was automatically our enemy, and cost what it might, the whole strength of the British people would be turned against Japan.

A few days later, as if to emphasize that madness was not confined to the Eastern part of the Axis, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States. That was the turning point of the war. From that moment, Churchill made his plans with something more than the faith that had buoyed him all through.

While the Japanese seized the immediate advantages,

and swept into Hong Kong, Malaya, Singapore, the Philippines, Burma, Churchill seized the opportunity to disappear again, this time to have a war conference—the first as Allies—with President Roosevelt in Washington.

His disappearance from the London scene was kept secret, as before, and one of the tricks used to cover the fact that “A Former Naval Person” was once more on the move was the publication of a picture of him buying a charity flag from a seller outside 10, Downing Street. It was quite authentic—but it had been taken ten days before it was published!

But the nation's nerves were a little on edge, and I well recall the shock we all had when the news came of the fall of Singapore. Perhaps because we knew so little about it, we had come to regard Singapore as an impregnable fortress that would hold out against all comers, against a world in arms. For years, there had been controversy about the place. A Labour Government had stopped work on it. A Conservative Government had ordered it to be completed as speedily as possible. Everybody, whether they were clear about Singapore's position on the map or not—and most were not—regarded it as the one place that would never fall to any enemy, however powerful.

And then, one morning, the nation awoke to the news that Singapore *had* fallen, and seemingly without a siege. Singapore gone! At first the news could hardly be believed. Some days before he had to make this announcement, I saw Churchill really upset and worried, for the first time in the whole run of the war.

He had been warned that serious news was coming from the Admiralty, and he hurried across to the House of Commons to wait for Mr. A. V. Alexander, the First Lord of the Admiralty, who was to bring him the naval signal as soon as it was received. Walking into the central hall of the Houses of Parliament, the Prime Minister sank down on one of the seats used by the public, to await the First Lord. Alexander ran in, a paper in his hand. Churchill looked at it, read it through, muttered: “My God!” and sat for a few moments looking into space.

Then, squaring his shoulders, he leaped up and strode

into the House, where he was given leave to interrupt the business to announce huskily that the great Royal Navy ships *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* had been sunk by Japanese air action, off the Malayan coast.

Going back to Downing Street, Churchill called a meeting of the Service and Planning Chiefs, told them to get ahead as fast as they could with plans for an Allied attack.

But the Japanese went on piling up their gains. The Dutch East Indies, British North Borneo, Sarawak, New Guinea, the Solomons, all were added to the list. People to whom these places were nothing more than spots on the map began to realize that vast supplies of vital raw materials, rubber, tin, oil, were being collected by the Japanese, were being lost by us.

And . . . the Japanese were creeping nearer and nearer to Australia. To Australia—a British Dominion!

That realization, on top of all the other bad news from the Far East, upset the British nation more than all the ordeals of the blitz or the events on the Continent of Europe. Morale was probably as low in those weeks as it has ever been in recent history. But Churchill had plans, and they were going forward.

British and United States forces went on withdrawing. The Japs took place after place, extending their grip, probing into our vital defences.

In the midst of all this bad news came one piece of good: United States land and air forces had landed in Britain. Soon the unfamiliar uniform of the United States soldier and airman was to become affectionately familiar in every town and village of Britain, and the children of the land were to adopt the grinning (and rarely unsuccessful) slogan: "Got any gum, chum?" But in those stern days, it was a great comfort to know that, at last, we were no longer alone.

Bright red tabs made their appearance on Churchill's minutes and memoranda to his Ministers and Service chiefs: "*Action This Day!*" The last vestiges of leisureliness and formality flew out of the windows of Whitehall, at any rate so far as the war effort was concerned.

Meanwhile, things were going wrong again in North

Africa. Those familiar names—Tobruk, El Alamein, all the rest—were coming into the news again, with the Germans gaining, the Allies losing.

It seemed the last straw.

Over to Washington again went Churchill. The news from North Africa grew worse and worse. While Churchill was actually in conference with President Roosevelt, he was handed a report that Tobruk had fallen to the victorious Rommel.

"I found it difficult to believe," I heard him say afterwards, "but in a few minutes my own telegram, forwarded from London, arrived. What a bitter pang this was to me ! What made it worse was that I was on an important mission in the country of one of our great Allies. Some people assume too readily that, because a Government keeps cool and has steady nerves under reverses, its members do not feel the public misfortunes as keenly as do independent critics. On the contrary, I doubt whether anyone feels greater sorrow and pain than those who are responsible for the general conduct of our affairs."

The House of Commons became restive, and there was talk of a change of Government. In distant Washington, Churchill read streamer headlines like: "Commons Demand Churchill Return Face Accusers," or "Churchill Returns to Supreme Political Crisis."

But, as he put it, "our American friends are not fair-weather friends" and his work was not upset. He hurried back to Westminster. I saw him hesitate at the door of the Chamber of the House of Commons, as if bracing himself to face the ordeal of a fight with the body he loved and respected above all in the world. He took from the door-keeper a little pinch of snuff, sniffed it noisily, and strode in.

"Only my unshakeable confidence in the ties which bind me to the mass of the British people upheld me through those days of trial," he told the House, without a trace of bitterness. There was no change of Government ; the critics were almost laughed out of court.

And what had Churchill done in Washington while the bad news flooded in—while disaster was reported from North Africa ? He had arranged with the President that

heavy supplies should be sent to the Middle East in preparation for the Allied *advance* from Egypt and for the coming landings in North Africa, that were later to prove the Beginning of the End for the German-Italian alliance !

Once more, in the midst of disaster, he was planning for Victory.

## CHAPTER THE SIXTEENTH

### SMASHING BACK

ALL this time, there were sporadic German air-raids on Britain, upsetting war industry from time to time, for it had become plain that, in a long war as this was now certain to be, industry would play the decisive part.

The decision was made to take a chance with our still none-too-plentiful bombers, and to send them a thousand at a time to smash German industrial areas. Nothing on this scale had been contemplated in the history of flying ; it was a move that at once staggered and exhilarated the imagination. The effect on the Germans was remarkable. Cologne felt the weight of the bomb-load of 1,130 bombers. The next day, Essen, the great arms centre, was raided by 1,036. Any thought the Germans might have had that the thousand-bomber raid was a "fluke" or a freak was quickly shattered.

So it went on, with disaster and triumph, triumph and disaster as "the companions of our journey."

Then the Russians began a great offensive against the Germans, and the news took a turn for the better. Stalingrad was recaptured, with the loss of 300,000 Germans—and 146,700 dead Germans were picked up on the field.

It is never an easy thing to order a retreat. Far easier is it, in the British and the United States mind, to hold on to the end, whatever the cost. But there are times when retreat is the right thing, in order to conserve forces for a drive later on. "He who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day," is not, perhaps, the most heroic

of sayings, but it has far more than a grain of truth. So reluctantly, as may be imagined, a hasty retreat was ordered when Tobruk fell and it was plain that the whole defences of Egypt were in jeopardy. The decision was a daring one, because it added more bad news to the already plentiful supply, and there is a limit to the morale of even the English-speaking peoples. Explanations that it is all for the best and that retreat is really a triumph never go over with the British people, and this was no exception.

Yet it was probably one of the great decisions of the war. The military experts decided that the configuration of the ground at El Alamein—dangerously near to Alexandria—gave good hope of a successful stand against the advancing Germans. To the uninformed, it looked as though the Germans were sweeping forward to triumph—and no amount of "well-informed views" to the contrary made any real difference.

But so it was. The time came, later in 1942, when smashing blows in North Africa brought ample reward and justification to those who had "fought and run away." To Rommel fell all the disasters, to the Allies the triumphs—victories more sweeping than any thought of in the most sanguine moments of the General Staff. The nation had had to wait for its good news; but it was well worth waiting for.

Once more, while the news flooded in, Churchill disappeared, this time to turn up in Moscow. The news on the Russian front just then was bad, and Churchill's visit had a remarkable effect on the Russians. He told Marshal Stalin of the Western Allies' plans to invade enemy-held territory in North-West Africa, of a bright scheme they had for the invasion of Italy, and then . . . something else. He left Stalin a much-cheered man.

On the way back, "Mr. Bullfinch" had a look at the troops on the El Alamein front. What he saw there made *him* a happy man.

\* \* \*

On November 8, 1942, Britain and the United States awoke to the biggest and brightest news they had had for a

long time. Churchill, with many members of his Cabinet, had stayed up all night to get the news as it came in, a dribble at a time, watching it build up into one of the most important facts of the war.

Secrets shared by thousands had been so well kept that strong British and American forces, under General Eisenhower, had arrived off the North-West African ports of Casablanca, Oran and Algiers, had stormed on to land, and had captured all three places. They just missed getting Tunis and Bizerta in the same swoop. The German grip on the African coast was reduced to a mere finger-hold, where, a few months earlier, it had been a sprawling stranglehold.

Things went wrong for Germany on the Russian front, too. At last, things looked really promising for the Allies.

Once more, the Prime Minister's secretaries regretted they were unable to make any more engagements for him at present—and he appeared in Casablanca, to which President Roosevelt had also flown. It was at this meeting that the famous "Unconditional Surrender" slogan—so often criticized, but so magnificently justified by the event—was born. It had a great effect on the minds of people on both sides. The Allied peoples took it as a sign that the initiative, at long last, was ours. The German people (however much the Propaganda Ministry ridiculed the idea) began to wonder whether such cocksureness could be entirely without foundation.

Success attended our arms in North-West Africa. A general called Bernard Montgomery began to achieve some added fame. His forces breached the Mareth Line, held by German forces brought with great travail by transport aeroplanes from other fronts. A force of Free French arrived at the crucial moment from the south. The Axis forces collapsed.

Germany was feeling the pinch. The pinch on Britain was easing.

All this time the bombs rained down ceaselessly on Germany, with the United States Army Air Force taking their full part from the first days of 1943. Place after place

was smashed by a series of "concentration" raids, night after night, day after day.

"Things," Winston conceded to a friend, "are looking definitely better!"

The capture of the African coast had given the Allies command of the Mediterranean—that "Italian lake" Mussolini had so often boasted about. From the airfields along the captured coast, the Allied air forces were able to bottle up the never very venturesome Italian navy. The Big Plan was working out.

Three thousand ships were massed at points of vantage, to carry 140,000 British, American, Canadian and French men, with 14,000 vehicles, 600 tanks and 1,800 guns. They waited. They pounced, and Sicily was ours.

The loss of an island so closely associated with the Italian mainland (it was rather as if the enemy had been in the Isle of Wight) faced both the Italians and their allies, the Germans, with big problems. The chief Italian problem was a political one, for the Italians had never shown the same enthusiasm for war and bloodshed as had their leader, Benito Mussolini. This may have been because it was their blood that was shed, while Il Duce's warlike operations were confined mainly to speeches from a safe balcony and the choice of a white horse with which to lead a triumphal march through Alexandria.

The Germans were presented with the problem of sending the highly necessary "stiffening" of German forces and materials the whole length of Italy, to resist the Allied advance. Since there was no certainty that any of these efforts would make the slightest difference to the result, it was a gamble of a kind the methodical Germans did not approve. But it was that—or the immediate collapse of one-third of the Axis, so the decision was made.

We had taken the precaution of collecting a few Italian islands, and this piece of foresight removed the sporting chance aspect from the German gamble. It also removed 18,000 enemy troops from the war, to be added to the already bulging prisoner-cages of the Allies.

Smoking his after-dinner cigar one warm night in July, 1943, Winston Churchill was handed a message which



told him that Benito Mussolini—"this jackal, this wicked man" as he had called him—had resigned, was no longer Duce, was, in fact, on the run.

He read the message through slowly, blew a cloud of smoke into the air. "M'm," he said, "*things are moving!*"

While the new Italian Government, under Marshal Badoglio, dithered, the Allies struck again, this time at the Italian mainland. To Sir Samuel Hoare (now Lord Templewood) went a secret Italian messenger, offering surrender. The offer was flashed to London, Washington. The new Italian Government, as a sign of good faith, released—"unconditionally," as they were careful to point out—the famous General Carton de Wiart, V.C., whom they had captured in the Africa fighting. It seemed good enough. London and Washington agreed to accept the surrender. Under the noses of the Germans, the Italians completed their plans to surrender to the Allies.

All was completed, the plans for the surrender made. The Allies were to be "let into" Rome, the Germans were to be made captive or killed everywhere. All was ready for the announcement of the triumph, when there was a "hitch."

A high Italian officer in the secret had betrayed it to the Germans. Within an inch of complete triumph in Italy, a brief telephone talk by an Italian had almost wrecked the whole thing. But, showing unusual vigour—perhaps their fear of the Allies was greater than their fear of the Germans—the Italians acted, and the surrender was signed. It took a long time and a lot of fighting to get Rome and the rest of Italy. Careless talk (as the warning posters used to say) had certainly cost lives.

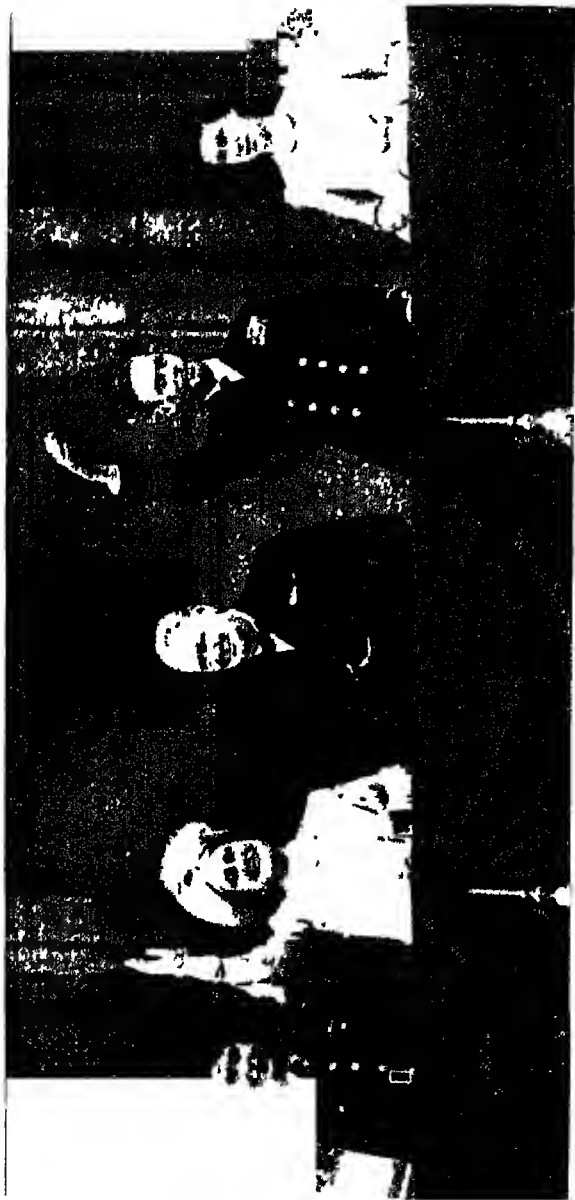
The British and Canadian forces, under General Montgomery, swept into the Italian mainland. The United States General Mark Clark took a big force into Naples, captured it.

Mussolini, who had held so many of his fellow-countrymen prisoner, was himself a prisoner, awaiting surrender to the Allied authorities. Then the Germans acted to aid their friend.

German parachute troops descended on the place where



"MONTY" ENTERTAINS "THE P.M."  
Outside the Field Marshal's Caravan H.Q.



VICTORY!

On the balcony of Buckingham Palace, with the King and Queen, Princess Elizabeth, and Princess Margaret, "VE-Day," May 8, 1945.

Il Duce was staying, got him from his guarded room, and took him with them to the north. In the light of after events, it is perhaps doubtful whether this was such a good turn to the fallen "popinjay"—another of Winston's names for him.

But, as he read the account of the rescue, there came into Churchill's eyes the same light of reluctant admiration that had been there when the first sirens shrilled in September, 1939. It was an exploit after his own heart. If the occasion had ever arisen, British parachutists would assuredly have employed the same technique in rescuing some important Allied prisoner. A good idea was a good idea, even if a German thought of it!

All this time, the war in the Far East, almost forgotten in the general excitement by most people, had to be looked after by the War Cabinet, and in minute detail by the Minister of Defence.

That, indeed, was one of the most trying of all the many aspects of the world war: it was not possible to work out plans for a campaign in Europe without having to plan also for a campaign in the Far East. An attack on France or Germany had to be balanced against an attack on some Jap-held island. All the time it was a world war for the Minister of Defence, however much others might concentrate on "one war at a time."

## CHAPTER THE SEVENTEENTH

### PLANNING THE CLIMAX

CONFERENCES followed, thick and fast. Churchill dashed to Quebec, to talk to President Roosevelt. Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden flew to Moscow, to talk with the Foreign Ministers of the U.S.A. and Russia about military co-operation. Churchill, Roosevelt and the Chinese leader, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, met in Cairo. And, two days later, what was to be perhaps the most important of all the wartime conferences took place at Teheran, in Persia.

The Soviet Government had made the plans for the safety of the delegates in what was reportedly the most spy-ridden town in the East. They roped off, and put canvas screens round, the entire Diplomatic Quarter of the town. Troops lined the streets day and night, and nearly every resident was put under guard. Taking no risks with the distinguished visitors, the Persians and the Russians between them made every security arrangement ingenuity could have conceived.

They had very definite ideas about the relative importance of individuals. A Prime Minister, for instance, was well above a Foreign Secretary when it came to a question of security.

Anthony Eden was surprised, therefore, when, having been received at the airfield with Eastern politeness and ceremonial, he was conducted first to an enormous, glistening, beflagged car. An official opened the door, motioned towards the luxurious cushions, murmured deferentially: "Will you be pleased to enter?"

"But surely," said Eden, "this is Mr. Churchill's car? I will follow in another."

The official smiled gently. "No, monsieur, it is *your* car!"

Puzzled, Eden climbed in, the official jumping up in front with the driver. Looking back, the Foreign Secretary saw Mr. Churchill being ushered towards a car of distinctly second-rate appearance, with no flag, and little polish. More puzzled than ever, he watched the seedy car go off by an entirely different route.

Then it dawned on him. He was to take the official route, in a conspicuous, ornate and beflagged car, while the Prime Minister went by a quiet route, in a car nobody would suspect of carrying one of the most famous men in the world. In other words, the security people were using him as a stalking-horse—a target for any gunman there happened to be around!

Eden is not wanting in courage, but that journey through the bumpy streets of Teheran must have been one of the most trying he ever made—which is saying a great deal. Turning a corner, the car stopped abruptly. There, right

across the entrance to the building to which Eden was being driven, was a donkey and cart, jammed hopelessly in the roadway. It was the old familiar method: a hold-up, a stopped car, and then—the bullets!

The official in front got active. Clearly he, too, expected bullets, if not bombs. But he rushed about, shouting, and soon half a dozen policemen were lifting the donkey and cart bodily out of the way.

With a jerk, the car started again, and the journey was over. Meanwhile, Churchill had travelled, unnoticed, by another route. He is said to have made it plain, later, that he did not approve of the use of his right-hand man as a means of drawing fire meant for him!

The conference at Teheran lasted for many days, and Churchill struggled through it with some difficulty, for he was feeling far from well. On the way back, he was taken so ill that he had to stay in Africa. It was pneumonia.

The news swept from the front pages the news of the war. The nation, always reluctant to show personal affection for anyone, most of all a politician, waited with undisguised anxiety for the bulletins. To his aid went all the modern inventions of science, M. and B., penicillin. To his bedside flew Mrs. Churchill—the “dear Clemmy” who had been his helper and adviser for so many years, who had never left his side in the ups and downs, the battles and triumphs of political life.

He had a tough time. Surrounded (it was the idea of the military, not his) by thousands of troops, he fought as grim a battle as any of his battle-full lifetime. For a time his condition was grave, and solemn-faced men and women crept about him anxiously.

But was the patient grave or worried? He was *not*! Sometimes gasping for breath, he composed bulletins about the battle inside himself between the forces of “M. and B.” and those of the “Microbes.” While nurses turned away to hide their tears at the sight of a man so ill, struggling for life, Churchill was chuckling as he thought of some new manoeuvre of the “M. and B.” forces, some brilliant counter-stroke by the wicked but indomitable

armies of the Microbes. He was very near to death at that time—far nearer than it was considered wise, in the public interest, to admit. But Churchill knew. The gay demeanour was for those who were attending him.

To a friend who visited him while he lay desperately ill, he said sadly: "If I am to die—as I feel I *am* to die—could there be a better place for my life to end than this beautiful spot, looking out to Cartagena?"

He fell silent, looking dreamily out to sea. From anyone else such a phrase would have sounded melodramatic, affected, slightly silly. From Winston Churchill, it seemed the voicing of a natural reflection.

But he did not die. He won—or, as he insisted, keeping up his sick-bed joke: "The forces of M. and B. compelled unconditional surrender by the Microbes, which is as it should be." But they could not keep the official papers from him, however ill he was, and always by his bedside was the red-leather-covered, steel-lined box in which secret papers were flown to him every day from Downing Street. Sometimes as he panted for breath he would look over a minute from the War Cabinet.

When, in a later illness, his doctor, Lord Moran, decided that his constant attention to papers was doing him harm and retarding his recovery, the problem was to find someone to tell him so, and persuade him to ignore his red boxes. Churchill was never what a nurse would call an ideal patient. He was restless, he would not take his medicine and his treatment without a lot of argument and debate. He would not rest when told.

And asking him to "lay off" official papers for a time was not going to be easy. A number of his Ministers politely declined the task. Then his close friend, Brendan Bracken, was asked to do it. Long years of study had given Bracken an insight into the mind and methods of thinking employed by his friend, and he breezed into the dimly lit sick-room with the blunt announcement:

*"You are going to die!"*

The sick Premier sat up—metaphorically—with a jerk, looked at the grim-faced Minister with astonishment.

"Yes," Bracken went on, "if you go on like this, *you're*

*going to die!* You can either live, in the interests of your country—or you can die, a martyr to your red boxes!”

Seeing the point, Churchill said gruffly: “You go to hell!”

But he sent the boxes away, and went cautiously for a time. His delayed-action caution, the quality which has often saved him from over-enthusiastic precipitancy, had come to his rescue.

Things were going, as Churchill put it, “very nicely” on the war fronts. Something far bigger was in preparation.

This was one of the most trying times of Churchill’s whole life. Up to then, when anyone had attacked him, he had attacked in return, and given as good as he got. But, this time, he could not answer back, for men’s lives, the success of the whole war, might depend on him. An incautious word might mean disaster for thousands of men, failure for a whole campaign, defeat for the Democracies, the triumph of the Dictators.

For the campaign for the “Second Front” began, with mysterious people daubing and chalking on the walls, holding meetings in Trafalgar Square, crying in the streets for “A Second Front in the West—Now!”

They did not know, these critics, that the military experts had worked it out that the loss of thirty divisions of Allied troops would make a stalemate peace inevitable—and a stalemate peace would have been a victory for Germany.

They did not know that, in all sorts of queer places, preparations were going on, plans being put into effect, men being massed. They did not know that the Second Front was taking shape, steadily, remorselessly, all the time they were shouting. *And Churchill could not tell them.*

## CHAPTER THE EIGHTEENTH

### THE SECOND FRONT

EVEN the House of Commons launched an attack on the Government for not opening a Second Front, and Churchill was regarded as a reactionary obstructionist for refusing



to promise that one would be opened at once. His jaw working as he sat with his lips tightly pressed together, Churchill listened and said nothing. It was not an experience he enjoyed, even though—or perhaps because—he knew what others did not know.

The plans for the Second Front were not without their trials and adventures. The most elaborate precautions were taken to ensure the complete 'secrecy of the plans. A favourite method of covering the real plans was to allow some false ones to be "discovered." Not a few highly placed officers got themselves into trouble with the newspapers by "losing" locked cases full of "secret plans." I suspect that not a few of these plans found their way to sources which discovered them to be highly interesting. Not until later—until too late—did they discover that they were also highly misleading.

But once or twice there were real alarms, for things went wrong with the genuine plans, and papers that might have cost the lives of thousands went astray.

There was the case of the airman who was given a highly secret paper to take personally to one of the high British Generals in Africa. He ran into bad weather, and his plane crashed. The pilot's body was washed up on the shore in a lonely part of the coast—and in the breast pocket of his tunic was the paper that would have told the German Intelligence a great deal. A local gendarme had a look at the body, examined it, and reported to superior authority. Some fast work was done by the Intelligence people. A secret agent had a look at the body—and there was the paper still in the pocket. He retrieved it. The military breathed again.

On another occasion, a lorry load of highly secret maps was caught by a gust of wind and the maps were sprayed about the English countryside. The first the high-ups heard of this affair was when a local policeman rang up to know what they wanted done with the maps!

Clearly it was hopeless to essay the invasion of the Continent without a port. So the Germans guarded the ports with all they had, and the thin Hun line ran along the beaches.

Strange little "sideshows" had been noticed by attentive readers of the newspapers, dating back as far as 1941. The island of Lofoten was raided early in 1941, and a fish oil factory was destroyed. Months later, the island was raided again, and more damage was done. There were other raids of which the public heard nothing. They proved that it would not be profitable to raid the Continent on a small scale, that only overwhelming force would succeed. Churchill read through all the reports made by the men with notebooks, who landed with the troops, then dictated a directive. Thus was the "Mulberry Port" conceived. I reproduce the directive elsewhere.

Two Mulberry ports were to be designed, one to handle 5,000 tons and the other 7,000 tons a day. Each was to be the size of Dover Harbour, which took seven years to build. But these ports must be completed in as many months, and they must be built in secret. There were to be fifteen miles of piers, causeways and breakwaters. They were to weigh about 5,000,000 tons. Concrete caissons, each as big as a block of flats, 146 of them, were to be built. In fields and all sorts of odd places, men got to work, building pieces and bits of the great ports—without knowing what the strange-looking things were for. It was a race against time.

At last, enough progress had been made for assembly to begin. From all over Britain trains and lorries converged on Selsey, down in Sussex, and slowly the giant dock grew up under the skilled hands of the experts. "Phoenix," "Gooseberry," "Bombardon," "Whale"—the secret code-names for the various parts of the vast Meccano—were fitted into their places.

Men were hurried here and there, to do things that seemed to have no special significance. Soldiers were hustled off to special camps to undergo strange training. Specialists painted lorries, guns, tanks with peculiar paint, which was to make them waterproof.

All the time the enthusiasts went on shouting for a Second Front, and daubing the walls, and writing articles and sending deputations to M.P.s. All the time, Churchill kept his mouth shut, took without a defensive word the

taunts and insinuations of his critics. It was not easy. Many a time he thought out a speech he might make—and then rejected it lest it give away some vital secret to the keen-eyed members of the German Intelligence.

In June, 1944—the 4th—Rome fell to the Allies. There was a general offensive in Italy. Things were moving fast again. On June 5, all was ready for the assault on Europe from the West. All but the weather. So marvellously was the thing organized that the whole vast project was put off for a day—and not disorganized. Anyone who has had any experience of the running of a highly organized project will know the confidence the commanders must have felt, to make that decision for delay.

During the night of June 5-6, a great Allied force, under the command of General Eisenhower, crossed the Channel and began a landing on the Normandy coast. The Mulberries were towed into position, and the great adventure had begun. It was D-Day.

When the Prime Minister entered the House, there was a low rumble of cheers, for Members knew that the strain on the Minister mainly responsible for the great event must be severe indeed.

At the end of questions, Mr. Churchill rose to make a statement about—the liberation of Rome. It was a thrilling piece of news, but it was not what everyone wanted to hear. But Churchill ploughed steadily through the longish statement he had prepared on Rome, before, turning a page, he added: "I have also to announce to the House that during the night and the early hours of this morning the first of a series of landings in force upon the European Continent has taken place. . . ."

There was a breathless cheer, and then dead silence.

"So far, the commanders report that everything is going according to plan," said the Prime Minister steadily. But suddenly his eyes gleamed and he cried: "And *what* a plan! This vast operation is undoubtedly the most difficult and complicated that has ever occurred. It involves tides, wind, waves, visibility, both from the air and sea standpoint, and the combined employment of land, air and sea forces in the highest degree of intimacy and in contact

with conditions which could not and cannot be fully foreseen.

"There are already hopes that actual tactical surprise has been attained, and we hope to furnish the enemy with a succession of surprises during the course of the fighting. . . . Nothing that equipment, science or forethought can do has been neglected, and the whole process of opening this great new front will be pursued with the utmost resolution, both by the Commanders and by the United States and British Governments whom they serve."

Thus, simply, and in few words, was announced to the House of Commons the greatest military event of all time. There were no flowers of oratory, no dramatization of events. Churchill, the journalist, knew that "a good story tells itself." The very simplicity of his words, the quietness of his tones, were more eloquent than purple patches about the gallantry of the men, the breathtaking peril of their task. The House was very silent and thoughtful as Churchill, rising abruptly, walked out.

He went at once to a field down in the south of England, where General Eisenhower had set up his headquarters, ready to advance into France as soon as circumstances permitted. To that field came all the news of the battle as it proceeded—and to that field went Britain's Minister of Defence, eager for every fact, ready to offer suggestions, to make spot decisions.

A few hours later he was back in the House of Commons, and I can still hear that husky roar of cheers as he announced that "this operation is proceeding in a thoroughly satisfactory manner. Many dangers and difficulties which at this time last night appeared extremely formidable are behind us. The passage of the sea has been made with far less loss than we apprehended. Our troops have penetrated, in some cases, several miles inland. Lodgments exist on a broad front."

## CHAPTER THE NINETEENTH

## THE BIRTH OF PLUTO

It is not too much to say that, in 1940, the defiant, buoyant, inspiring, urgent speeches of the Prime Minister were almost all that stood between Britain and invasion. And if invasion had come—then—it would have been a sanguine man who would not admit that it might well have meant defeat.

But the speeches were not all that was going on. The speeches, a flood of them, delivered here, there and everywhere, were merely a smoke-screen behind which feverish preparations were going forward. Churchill, at the time when most people were concentrating on plans to *resist* the invader, was planning to *become* an invader and to turn the tables on the swaggering conqueror of all Europe.

It was a long and complicated task. For we had to start from scratch in most things. Nearly everything we had for the Army was left on the beaches of Dunkirk or on the battlefields inside France or Belgium. And the invention of new weapons and new methods of warfare was going ahead so fast that, almost as soon as a new type of machine or weapon had been put into production, it began to be out-of-date, and something entirely fresh had to be made, to keep up with the Germans who had by now taken possession of almost all the arms-making facilities of Europe.

There was a certain amount of "sales-resistance" among the older generation of naval, military and air experts to new ideas, some of which were revolutionary in character. But they found no support in the Prime Minister. His motto was "Let's try it! It can't do any harm to try—and it *may* come off!"

Over and over again he thus ended some critical conference of Service experts and Ministers before which a new scheme had been laid. Often, of course, the ideas fell

down when put to the test of practical use. But often they came off magnificently.

The man who had invented the air defence of London, who had—as much as any one man—invented the tank, was not likely to be deterred by a few criticisms or difficulties, still less by expert views that “it couldn’t be done.”

Perhaps his mind went back to those days when he was at the Admiralty early in World War I, and he had induced a careful Treasury to give him the vast sum of £45,000 for research into the development of armoured cars, which the Admiralty experts regarded as a somewhat crazy obsession of the otherwise comparatively sane First Lord!

But Churchill thought there was something in his idea that an armoured car could be made which would cross trenches and thus enable the infantry to make progress, where they were, in the conditions then existing, compelled to stay in their trenches and slog away at each other, like a couple of heavy-weight boxers, while the casualty lists mounted and mounted, and the lifeblood of the nation ebbed.

So he sent to the experts a minute which caused great laughter at the time. It suggested that they should build—this was in January, 1915—“steam tractors with small armoured shelters in which men and machine-guns could be placed, and which would be bullet-proof.”

Is not that quite a recognizable description of a tank? Even before that, in November, 1914, he had worked out in his head a plan for an armoured car which would carry a bridge with it, which should be laid across enemy trenches, used by the car to cross them, and then drawn up after it.

Before the first tanks existed, Churchill had decided how they should be used in battle. “They would make so many *points d’appui* for the British supporting infantry to rush forward and rally on them.” That, broadly, was the technique that was to bring such swift and overwhelming—and comparatively bloodless—victory in the years 1944 and 1945.

Urging his plans before the Cabinet (and it is astonishing

to realize, now, the great battle he had to convince Mr. Asquith and others that his idea "had something") Churchill made the plea which has produced such great results in this war: "If the experiment did not answer, what harm would be done?"

So, off his own bat, Churchill authorized the spending of £70,000 on tanks, commenting: "If I have to appear before a Parliamentary Committee, I shall not be able to defend it!"

The tank which was tried out at Hatfield—called "Big Willie," after the Kaiser Wilhelm—tore along at the breathless speed of two miles an hour, and had a 150 horse-power engine. But it did what was wanted of it, and seemed capable of further development—so the War Office placed an order for . . . forty!

Ludendorff made no secret of the fact that one of the main reasons for the Germans seeking an armistice in 1918 was the unexpectedly large number of tanks used against them. For once the prejudice against anything new had been overcome, the advantages of these "Land-ships" were patent to all.

But it had taken a flood of minutes, innumerable acid, pleading speeches to the War Cabinet, many "risks" with public money, to get the very idea of a tank recognized.

Why "tanks"? The name was adopted for security purposes, so that the workmen employed on making the parts might receive some reply to the questions they inevitably asked. They were told that the weird-looking machines were to carry petrol or water to the troops in exposed places. The technique of giving an innocent explanation for a "Top Secret" development was used many times in the second World War.

Churchill rarely turned down a new idea, however fantastic it might seem, however much the experts guffawed—perhaps least of all, then.

When he came to the Premiership, the first thing he did was to make it clear to all in the Government service, from Ministers to junior clerks, that all ideas would be considered and that over-Departmentalization—the outlook that says an oil expert can know nothing of coal, a

shipping expert nothing of railways—was to be discouraged. The result was that many a bright idea came from unexpected quarters.

So, while we laboured to keep the enemy from our shores, the Prime Minister planned for the time when we should take the full force of our arms to the shores of the Continent. And one of the problems that might baffle us would be the supply of petrol and oil in the vast quantities needed by a modern army and air force. A great fleet of tankers would be needed—and all we had were engaged on the vital task of bringing the petrol and oil from the producing countries. And then there would have to be great docks, with their special facilities for pumping oil, and then enormous storage tanks.

That would mean that the tankers would be in constant danger of being sunk by German planes or U-boats, that the docks would be open to attack from the air, and that the storage tanks might be set alight, destroying vast quantities of oil and probably shattering the docks and the dockers into the bargain.

Yet, without oil, the tanks and the planes, and the lorries and the means by which a modern army moves, and without which it is almost helpless, might as well not have been assembled or built. Somehow, the oil had to be got there, and in enormous quantities.

Oil was coming into the country in large quantities, although not, unfortunately, without considerable losses of tankers. Many an anxious hour was spent by Ministers in the locked, guarded Chart Rooms, where the precise positions of all convoys, the extent and place of sinkings, were indicated by means of vivid coloured graphs. But, slowly, surely, the tanks of Britain were filling up. And that very fact was worrying a lot of Ministers and officials. In those days of intensive air-raids, it was not always easy to transport oil in bulk to the parts of the country where it was most wanted—the airfields, the tank centres, the R.A.S.C. depots. Besides, the transport was using up precious railway space, wearing out rolling-stock and railway tracks that might be sorely needed to carry men and guns later on.



Washing his hands one day, an official suddenly thought :  
"Why shouldn't *petrol* come out of a tap, too?"

He asked other officials, and the answer seemed to be :  
"Yes, why not?"

From that simple question grew one of the most useful inventions of the war, "the Oil Grid." Orders were given for the laying of pipe-lines all over Britain, so that it should be possible to turn on a tap in any part of the land and get a flow of petrol for all needs. At once, great gangs of navvies were set to work to dig miles of trenches, five or six feet deep, cutting across roads, through rivers, over hills, across dales, straight—like some Roman road—to their objectives. Across meadows the trenches ran, through towns and villages, forests and parks, until an oil map of Britain looked like some anatomical chart of the veins and arteries of a human body. As fast as the men dug the trenches, more men came and laid the pipe-lines, still more men filled in the earth.

Soon 1,000 miles of pipeline roamed about Britain, with branches to airfields, to tank centres, to R.A.S.C. depots—everywhere bulk supplies were needed. All that those who needed petrol had to do was to turn on a tap, and there, flowing freely, was the petrol. It made all the difference between defeat and success, often, when it was a matter of getting fighters up at short notice, in the days of the flying bombs and in the other air-fights.

It is impossible to compute how many lives this plan must have saved, or how many gallons of petrol it put into the tanks of war-machines instead of into the depths of the oceans. Soon 5,000,000 gallons a day were flowing through those mysterious pipes. Because they were buried so deeply, the pipes did not interfere with the cultivation of the fields through which they passed. Our food supply did not suffer. Night work helped to ensure that there was no delay to traffic as the pipes were laid across roads.

But it was not enough. When the time for the invasion of the Continent came, some means would have to be found to get the vast supplies of oil to the distant shores. We should not be able to spare the many tankers necessary, and we certainly should find it difficult to get the oil over

to the Continent in the steady flow, and bulk, so necessary to a mass assault.

It was only one of many great problems that faced the planners of the Invasion of the Continent, but it was a crucial one. Somehow, a solution *had* to be found.

The man mainly concerned with this was Mr. Geoffrey Lloyd, whose job as Secretary for Petroleum was taken by the man in the street to be confined to the "cushy" one of handing out the niggardly petrol allowances given to motorists. But he had many other jobs—strange, remote, romantic jobs that seemed to have but little to do with petroleum.

One day in April, 1942, Lloyd was in conference with Lord Louis Mountbatten, then Chief of Combined Operations, about flame-throwing weapons—another by-product of petroleum. "Dicky" Mountbatten had shown himself to be a man of ideas and (more rare) a man who could see the point of other people's ideas. Moreover, as a member of the powerful Chiefs of Staffs Committee, which was the ultimate court of appeal on all matters military, he had a great pull. Mountbatten was shown the "Churchill Crocodile," the queer-looking tank equipped with flame-throwing apparatus, which was later to form so important a part of the invasion plan.

"That," said he, with boyish enthusiasm, "is the very thing to break the crust!"

It did a lot more than that, when the time came. Mountbatten's enthusiasm and prestige got it adopted and manufactured in great numbers.

Lloyd asked him whether his Department could do anything more to aid the fast-moving invasion plans, to hasten D-Day.

"You can," grinned the good-humoured "Dicky," looking sideways at the Minister. "You can lay us a pipeline across the Channel!"

"That's a good one!" laughed the Minister, and let it go at that.

But on the way back to London he found the idea turning over and over in his mind: "A pipeline across the Channel . . . a pipeline across the Channel." As

soon as he got to his office, he sent for experts, astonished them by putting up the proposition, got the reply that it simply could not be done. For one thing, the pressure of the tides was too great. So was the distance. And the danger from air or submarine attack. And, besides, the pipe would block up the Channel, make it impassable for shipping. And if some way were found to overcome that difficulty, the pipe would kink, or burst, or something, just at the critical time when everything in the world depended on its being unkinked, unbroken.

"I think it can be done," said Lloyd, "but Heaven knows how!"

He sent for some more experts, and Pluto was born.

#### CHAPTER THE TWENTIETH

#### A DREAM COMES TRUE

Look at this problem: In Britain there are millions of gallons of oil, stored in vast underground tanks in all sorts of surprising places. This oil, thanks to the grid, can be supplied to any part of Britain by the mere turning of a tap. But the oil is wanted even more ardently on the other side of the heaving, turbulent English Channel. It is wanted in France—when the time for invasion comes. And until some satisfactory means of ensuring that it will get to France *can* be worked out, it is not safe to commit the huge armies of the Allies to the Great Adventure of invasion. And, since it is a long and difficult job, arranging an invasion of the Continent, there is no time to be lost.

That was the problem that faced the experts who gathered in the private room of the Secretary for Petroleum in April, 1942. Outside, things were none too bright. The war was not, seemingly, going any too well for us, even though we had won the Battle of Britain. In the quiet room, overlooking the Thames, the experts sat down at a

long mahogany table and were presented by the Minister with the problem that had to be solved if the "Second Front" were ever to become anything more than a slogan.

At the table, in addition to Civil Service experts, was Mr. A. C. Hartley, Chief Engineer of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, who sat silently through the recital of the problem and the preliminary expressions of belief (in varying tones of confidence!) that the thing could be solved. He pulled at his lower lip, and thought.

"Mr. Hartley, have you any ideas?"

"I *believe* I have—" a trifle doubtfully. "Why not make a large-sized submarine cable, without the middle core? That would make a pipeline, and the oil could flow through where the core ought to be?"

"I think," said the Minister, "you've *got* something there!"

It was the turn of the other experts to pull their lower lips in sceptical reflection. A cable was one thing—it could be paid out from a cable-layer and would sink gracefully to the bed of the ocean, there to rest for decades. But a pipe was something entirely different. The stresses and strains of the sea itself would surely rupture the pipe after a short time. The slightest wear in the hollow cable would mean that it would leak, and millions of gallons of precious oil might go into the sea as surely as if the tankers which had carried it from the end of the earth had gone to the bottom.

And the submarines which occasionally got into the Channel could, with grappling irons, ruin the whole plan. And, in any case, it was not possible to make a cable of the sort suggested, of such length and strength that it would withstand the pressures from within and without—for the oil would have to be pumped across under high pressure if it were to be of any use.

And, even if all these difficulties were overcome, the pipe would kink, just like the garden-hose, and there would be mysterious stoppages of the supply just when it was most needed in the vital battles for the liberation of Europe. No, it was a bright and original idea—but it would not work.

"Well," ruled Geoffrey Lloyd, "we'll place an experimental order for a hollow cable of the kind you suggest, Hartley. Say, a thousand yards. If it works, well and good. If it doesn't—well, we'll think of something else." That afternoon the order was placed.

So mystified workers in a cable factory got an order to make the better part of a mile of cable without any core. In not much over a week, it was made and delivered. The Post Office cable-ship *Alert* was commandeered for the experiment, which took place in a quiet part of the Thames.

Anxiously the experimenters, in dungarees, hauled the hollow cable over the side of the ship, watched it as it came in—found, to their horror, that it kinked badly, got twisted into fantastic shapes, generally behaved as the most pessimistic of the experts had foreseen.

"It is an impossible proposition, because it is hollow!" ruled most of the experts. "The moment there is any stress on it, it will kink."

Lloyd's reply to that was to order three miles of the hollow cable, so as to make a larger-scale experiment. One month after "Dicky" Mountbatten had made his half-challenging, half-joking demand for a pipeline to France, the anxious party of experts was in Chatham Dockyard, putting down a couple of miles of the hollow cable, round and round one of the basins. This time, it seemed to go down all right, without too many kinks or unwanted twists. So it was decided to pump water through it, just to see if a liquid would go through. Petrol was too precious to risk.

In silence the water supply was turned on. The party waited an eternity. Nothing happened. Not a drip of water came from the far end of the pipeline. The pessimists looked quietly triumphant; the optimists were downcast. "I guess we've had it!"

As they turned away, the experts were startled to hear a loud hiss, and swinging round they found—that the far end of the pipeline was gushing water. So the darned thing *did* work!

"Wait a minute, though," cautioned the sceptics, "it is

one thing to make it work in the quiet and calm of the dockyard at Chatham, but quite another to make it work across the turbulence of the Channel, with its constant tugging of the tides and its nearly thirty miles of length."

"Anyway," said the optimists, "it can be done—and it will be done."

A few days later, Lloyd might have been seen entering No. 10, Downing Street, carrying under his arm a foot-long cylinder which smelt strongly of tar. This he placed carefully under the luncheon table, where it remained until, the meal over, Churchill began to talk business. Without a word, the young Minister lifted up the mysterious cylinder and placed it on the table in front of his chief.

Looking it over carefully, Winston eventually gave it up and asked: "Well—what's this, eh?"

"It is," said Lloyd, "a new secret method of supplying oil to the Continent in bulk in the invasion."

"Mph!" said Winston. "Will it work?"

He was given details of the experiments, his eyes growing brighter and brighter with excitement as he listened. He, of all men, knew what it was to triumph over difficulties—and experts—and to produce success from something everyone had condemned to failure. He smiled as the younger Minister grew more and more enthusiastic, explained that, by means of the pipeline, the oil could be drawn from a tap, that the supply would never fail, whatever the storms, however thick the fogs, however fierce the bombing or the barrage, whatever the U-boats did to the tankers on the Channel route.

Churchill took a long, reflective pull at his cigar, blew the smoke into the air, *thought a moment*, and then said: "Geoffrey, you push ahead! And come to me if you are in trouble!"

So orders were given for a lot more of the hollow cable, and the factories hummed with activity. But—laying it was not going to be too easy a task. To be safe, there must be no joins in the pipeline, for joints, except those securely made in manufacture, were always a source of possible weakness. And it was not going to be a simple

thing to lay seventy miles of the writhing snake from Sandown, in the Isle of Wight, to Cherbourg, even if the other—the “short”—route, from Dungeness to Boulogne, proved a practical proposition.

Borrowing a little of the P.M.'s dramatic technique, the Secretary for Petroleum demanded of his experts: “Having got so far, are we to accept defeat now?” The answer was definitely in the negative. But there is a gap between determination not to accept defeat and the ability to find some way to avoid it.

Another cable-laying ship was requisitioned, and the hopeful experts got to work again, making adaptations to the machinery. Someone—probably an amateur gardener—observed that a hose was less liable to kink if it were filled with water, so the hollow cable was filled with water as it was laid, and the kinking stopped.

Next problem was to test whether the pipe would stand up to pressure, from within and from without. Up to the bleak seas off the Isle of Man went the experts, with orders to test the pipeline under conditions at least as severe as any likely to be encountered in the Channel.

It was a great evening when the chief of the pessimists went to Lloyd and said, simply: “I’ve changed my mind. I *think* there’s—there’s just a chance of pulling it off!”

But the Minister knew the Service experts would never accept the plans until they had been shown, by full-scale trial, to be a practical proposition. So a full-scale trial was decided on.

To the puzzled cable-makers went an order for thirty miles of this ridiculous new cable. In a short time it was ready. It was decided to lay it in the Bristol Channel, where conditions of stress and general wear-and-tear were at least as severe as those of the English Channel.

As the people of bomb-battered Bristol thought nostalgically of the church bells that, in happier times, would have rung out the last hours of 1942, rung in the first hours of 1943, the cable was paid out into the Channel. A gale raged as the operation went forward. The Minister was being heartily sick in an aeroplane which flew up and

down the route of the cable ship, watching the partial realization of a dream.

The pipe was joined up to the two shores, running between Swansea and Ilfracombe, and the pumps were turned on. This time it was the real thing—petrol was coming through. For months, the petrol used in North Devon and Cornwall came through that pipeline from Swansea, but nobody outside the organization knew.

After a few months, it was suggested that the line should be closed down, but, foreseeing that the reluctant might say it could not stand the strain of long and constant work, the enthusiasts kept it going for a year. And a thing that could work for a year, in some of the trickiest tides and conditions to be found around Britain's coasts, could work for longer, and certainly as long as was likely to be needed for an invasion of the Continent. In a year, an invasion would certainly have succeeded or failed.

And into the secret files went the brief announcement that PLUTO—"Pipe Lines Under The Ocean"—was a success. A success, that was, so far as experiment could show. None could tell, till D-Day came, whether the success would be repeated in actual invasion conditions.

The Principal Administrative Officers—that austere body which sometimes took so much convincing, but which, once convinced, had so much power to drive an idea into effect—ruled that the pipelines were essential for the conduct of the invasion of the Continent. For one thing, it relieved them of the need to find more docks and tankers for the task, and that was worth untold man-hours.

The Chiefs of Staff Committee, under Mountbatten's influence, gave hearty support—well, hearty is putting it a trifle high, perhaps, but at any rate support!—to the plan, and "Force Pluto" was formed to get on with the task of preparing to lay the pipelines at the right moment. The cable-ship *Holdfast* was joined by three more, and the plans went ahead.

But even the enthusiasts had not got rid of their last fears. Supposing—supposing the line failed, just as our men had gained an insecure and perilous foothold on the



Continent? Supposing, having got the tanks and the self-propelled guns, and the lorries, and the jeeps and all the other machines that depended on oil, safely on to the stricken land of Europe, the supply of oil failed? Supposing, having put all our eggs into that one basket of the hollow cables, someone upset the basket and broke all the eggs? Supposing . . .

There ought to be an alternative to the hollow cables, everybody agreed. But what?

When the early experiments were going on in Chatham Dockyard, they were watched by Mr. H. A. Hammick, chief engineer of the Iraq Petroleum Company, and Mr. B. J. Ellis, chief engineer of the Burmah Oil Company. They watched with the eyes of men of great experience in the handling of oil, and, as the pumps began to turn, they said to Geoffrey Lloyd: "You know, this could be done with a steel pipe!"

The other experts had had too many shocks in recent days to laugh very loudly at this opinion. Hammick explained that he had seen the steel pipelines from the oilfields hurled high into the air by some internal explosion, to fall, twisted into figures of 8, but unbroken. And it was comparatively simple to straighten them out. Therefore, he argued, steel pipes must be flexible to an extraordinary degree, and capable of serving the purpose the experts had in mind.

So this idea, too, was referred to the manufacturers. A great circle of steel piping was made, and then slowly straightened out—and it did not break or crack or kink. A special factory was set up to make the new pipe, which was to be of three-inch inside diameter, as against the two inches of the hollow cables then in experimental use. This would more than double the amount of petrol that could be pumped through in a day.

Nobody had ever thought of a steel pipe seventy miles long, but a trifle of that sort did not bother anyone in those hectic days when we were preparing to invade while we prepared to resist invasion.

Those who know the peacetime power—and sales-resistance—of the Treasury will appreciate the tense

atmosphere of those times when I record that not until he had committed the country to the spending of hundreds of thousands of pounds did the Secretary for Petroleum ask for Treasury sanction. And then he did it, casually, in conversation with Sir Kingsley Wood, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, whom he met during a short walk among the penguins in the sunshine of St. James's Park! And the guardian of the nation's purse-strings sanctioned the spending with a cheery nod and good wishes for success. The shades of generations of Treasury officials must have shuddered!

The great pipe was made. Then yet another "snag" appeared: how was it to be laid? It took a lot more deck-room than the hollow cable, and no ship could carry the whole lot at one time. A new method of laying the pipe had to be found. Ellis suggested an enormous saucer-shaped platform, on which the pipe should be curled, and paid off like the ribbon on a typewriter. This was made and tried out, but did not work very well, although it was clearly a step in the right direction.

Then somebody thought of a great reel, like a bobbin, which would float on the water and pay out the pipeline as it went. Workmen (most of them firmly convinced by now that insanity was rife among the High-ups) began the task of building a bobbin 40 feet in diameter, 60 feet long, and weighing 1,600 tons—as much as a destroyer.

This strange vessel, aptly named *H.M.S. Conundrum*, was to be towed by two tugs, with a third restraining its tendency to overrun its guides.

And when the time came, this queer-looking, bobbing, jerking "ship" was among the many surprising craft that made their way to the Continent, laying between Britain and France the pipe that was to make so great a contribution to victory.

A month or so after D-Day, the pipeline was working. At first, a hundred thousand gallons a day was delivered. Then 200,000. Then 300,000, and up and up until 1,000,000 gallons and more a day was being delivered. It was possible to regulate the supply according to demand, so that there was no waste—but, even more important, no

waiting. A soldier or airman, casually turning on a tap in France, could draw his supply, through the oil grid, from Liverpool. Soon, through the military pipelines laid on the Continent, it was possible to draw direct from Britain, without the intervention of a single tanker, a single lorry.

As he watched the pipeline in action, when he visited the battlefields of France, and right up to the Rhine, Winston Churchill smiled and nodded approvingly. Another daring innovation had "come off" magnificently.

Pluto must have wagged his tail as vigorously as Walt Disney ever made him do on the films.

Before long, a dozen lines of pipes carried the precious petrol to the front, to meet the staggering demands of the British and American forces. Never once, however hot the battle, however swift the pace of advance, did the petrol supply let the troops or the air forces down.

It had been a masterpiece of well-kept secrecy, for many thousands of people had had to be in the know on some part of the vast organization necessary to produce and lay the pipes. Workmen and others were told that the pipes were "something to do with the water supply"—and Goering's incendiary bombs, just then much in evidence, lent colour to the popular theory that the pipes were intended to carry fire-quenching water through the worst blitzes. In a figurative sense, that was true!

Before this time came, a careful observer might have noticed strange activity in a row of badly blitzed seaside bungalows on Britain's coast. Engineers appeared to be working hard, but the bomb-damage did not seem to be repaired. But the careful observer *would not* have been permitted to see what the engineers *were* doing, for they were putting up, inside those shattered little holiday bungalows, powerful pumping machines. And, in due course, those bungalows and those machines were to pump lifeblood into an ailing Continent.

Over-inquisitive people who wanted to know what was going on in those little holiday bungalows got their answer from the stolid military policemen who were on duty day and night. It was simple and direct, if not precisely

informative: "You get to hell out of here—and mind your own business!"

And the U-boat commanders, with their questing grappling irons, never knew the secret. Or, up to now, what they had missed!

## CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIRST

### VICTORY!

ONCE the button had been pressed, and the vast invasion had been launched, the result, as Churchill put it to his Service chiefs, was "with God." They were anxious days, those first days of the invasion, for the very size of the effort brought those on the inside of things face-to-face with the stark fact that it must be either overwhelming success—or overwhelming failure. Had it been failure, D-Day for us might well have become V-Day, for the enemy.

A few days after the first of the troops had fought their way on to the Normandy shore, Churchill went over to "have a look." He was satisfied. The course was set for Victory, he told his intimates when he got back. Steadily, surely, the advances went on. Soon, the Allies were in Paris, and Churchill went there as a Goodwill Ambassador, to receive the rapturous cheers of the French crowds, and to address them fervidly in his strange French, with his even stranger accent. Not many days later, it seemed, the Allies had swept into Northern France, into Belgium, into Holland. Churchill lived almost day and night in the secret War Room at the Office of the Minister of Defence, often moving for himself the red ribbon on the great maps, showing the advancing Allied line.

And so the Rhine was reached. Everybody took it for granted that Churchill would be on the spot when the great time came for crossing the Rhine—and so he was.

He was across the broad river very soon after the first of the soldiers and his presence had an amazing effect on the troops.

Someone who was there told me that the men had more the air of a bank-holiday crowd than of those going into battle. They roared at the Prime Minister, "Good old Winnie!" ; they shouted their appreciation of his "V" sign.

He sent them a note of encouragement, called their task "This noble adventure." Then he returned to London, to the task he hated : that of looker-on from afar. His first thought was to ensure once more that all the demobilization plans were complete ; he told his Cabinet colleagues that "nothing is too good, in the years that are to come, for the men who are soon to bring home the victory."

Victory came, swift and overwhelming. Churchill was at Chequers when the news was given him that Hitler's right-hand man, Himmler, had proposed to surrender unconditionally to the Western Allies, but not to Russia. Years before, when he heard the news of the landing of Rudolf Hess in Scotland, he had commented with great foresight : "*He is the maggot in the Nazi apple!*" Now the rottenness of the apple was apparent. Churchill's reply to Himmler's proposal was clear and brief : "No, it's *all or none!*" He was not exultant.

Historians will, perchance, record that when the news of the surrender offer from Himmler was first brought to him, Churchill made a little speech about the downfall of the "evil things," the triumph of the right. Had it been conveyed to him in public, he might well have done so. As it was, the news reached him in private, and his only comment was the typically Churchillian under statement : "*This is very interesting!*"

For all his calmness, he sat for a time looking thoughtfully at his cigar-end. Then he said, half-jokingly, half-seriously : So Europe is free—at last! Now, what about liberating Britain? Let's get rid of the surplus Regulations!"

Herbert Morrison, the Home Secretary, had already made a list of the Regulations that could safely be dropped

when the European war ended, and, a few hours after the fighting stopped in Europe, they were cancelled. Even before this, Churchill had caused delighted laughter when he shouted : "Hear, hear !" to Morrison's announcement of the abandonment of the blackout, which he hated, believed to be largely unnecessary, and depressing to morale. But the Air Marshals wanted it, and, reluctantly, he gave way to expert opinion.

The German war machine fell to pieces. The end came. Unconditional surrender, so often regarded as impossible, was achieved. It was victory beyond the dreams of the wildest optimist.

In the days that followed, as the news of the death of the "whipped jackal" Mussolini, of Hitler himself, of the other Axis high-ups, and finally the disappearance of Himmler, came in, Churchill made no comment. He did not gloat over his fallen foes.

Only once did he make any comment at all—when they told him Himmler had taken poison. Then he said quietly : "Justice has been done !"

\* \* \*

As I sat in the House of Commons on May 8, 1945, listening to the distant roar of the sunlit crowd celebrating VE-Day ("That," Churchill had explained, with a grin, a day or two before, "means Victory in Europe Day") my mind went back to that other sunny day, more than five years ago, when the cloud of war had descended on the world. I saw in my mind's eye the scene (in that Chamber that was now a mere shell) with Chamberlain standing shaken at the table, the white-faced Members looking intently at him. I saw Churchill sitting in the back-bench seat he had occupied for ten long years of the "wilderness." I saw that night when the political storm had burst, and the nation had found its Man of Destiny in Winston Spencer Churchill. I saw Churchill, standing at the dispatch box, in good times and in bad, grimly telling the nation to expect nothing but hard tidings, jovially congratulating it on successes, urging and encouraging everybody to still greater efforts, announcing, with satisfaction and proper

pride, the victories that came our way, without depression the setbacks that came, too. I saw the House angry with him, and the House leaping on to the benches to cheer him. I saw him in good times and in bad, cheery and irritable, but always ready with the appropriate word.

And then he strode in, slowly, smilingly—and the whole House cheered him as it had never cheered before, forgot its dignity and leaped on to the benches, wildly waving order-papers.

He smiled around, but there were tears in his eyes and on his cheeks. He announced the greatest victory British arms had ever achieved.

We crossed to St. Margaret's Church to give thanks for the deliverance, and I stood a yard or two from Winston Churchill throughout that moving service. His voice rose above most in the singing of the hymns, for this service of thanks was a very real thing to him ; he knew how great had been the dangers, how miraculous the deliverance.

*"When cruel men against us furiously  
Rose up in wrath, to make of us their prey."*

Outside, the crowd chanted : "Churchill, Churchill, Churchill ! We want Churchill !"

Far into the night he sat with his Ministers, many times he went on to a balcony to acknowledge the crowd's endless cheers and to thank the people for their part in the victory.

It was a glad, mad day. But his task was not done. Others might relax ; for him there was still half the war to be won—the war against the pitiless Japanese, the war that went on, though Germany had fallen in ruins.

That night, with the joyous crowds still shouting outside, he called a meeting of the military, naval and air chiefs, told them that there must be no easing up in the efforts to bring Victory in the East, that every ounce of force we could command must be brought to bear on the Far Eastern conflict.

## CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SECOND

## LOOKING FORWARD

I HAVE attempted to give a close-up of Churchill, as he is, not as he may have been imagined or idealized. I have tried to show his whims, his fads and fancies, as well as his qualities. He would be the last to claim that this has been a "one-man war"—indeed, he has gone out of his way to pay warm tributes to Ministers, Service chiefs and others who have played vital parts. The more one knows of the inner workings of the wartime Government, however, the clearer it is that it was Churchill who held the machine together ; who could press down the accelerator to get a little more speed in an emergency ; who, by his oratory and leadership, kept the nation united and single-minded when crisis was heaped on crisis ; who put the brake on over-optimism when over-optimism might have been a danger to our war effort.

It is easy to over-praise a man who has performed such deeds. It is as easy, when some new set-up in politics comes along, to forget or belittle services rendered in a vital hour.

Perhaps it will be difficult, in the stress of the political strife that seems, as I write these lines, to be blowing up—but if we are to have any perspective in viewing the history of our times, we must remember.

But Churchill's task is not done. It will not be done, in his view, even when the Son of Heaven has surrendered to the United Nations.

For he sincerely believes he must bring the nation to genuine peace and prosperity before he can truly say we have won the war—and he is not a man who likes leaving a job half done.

*Is Churchill a man of war ?* Can there be any doubt about the answer to that question ? E'en the ranks of Tuscany—in the persons of the German General Staff—could scarce forbear to cheer his contribution to the victory



in the West. Nobody who has seen him, as I have, about his manifold wartime tasks, can doubt that to him, above all men, goes main credit for the victory.

*But is Churchill also a man of peace?* That is a more complicated question to answer, if only because it takes one into the realm of political strife, which I have tried to avoid in presenting this portrait.

There was a time, during the war, when a rumour got around that Churchill was "not interested" in the problems of peace, that he thought only of war. It was, indeed, true that while it raged the war took first place in his thoughts. He often told his Ministers: "Unless we win the war, we need not plan for the peace, for there will *be* none!"

At the height of the whispered complaints that he thought only of war, he broadcast a speech in which he outlined his now-famous Four Year Plan—and showed that he had as strong and detailed a grip of the problems of peace as he had of those of war. It also showed great faith in our ultimate victory.

For the plan included a big expansion of social insurance, schemes for increasing employment and trade. It showed awareness of the needs, the ambitions, the aims of the men and women of the country. And the "not interested" rumour died.

His is a strangely complicated character. He can be irascible, impatient of criticism—or gentle and kind to the least-informed critic. He can go to incredible lengths to do a kindness or a favour to one who has little right to expect it—or he can be utterly ruthless to someone close to him. He can be crusty and ill-tempered when things go wrong—or he can show an understanding of the trials and difficulties of others that is astonishing. He loves the show and pomp, the publicity and the power of office—yet he is his own severest critic. He revels in the new and unusual (funny hats, a queer uniform, are small manifestations of this trait)—yet he reveres tradition and takes pride in history. He will fight a political opponent until he or his antagonist lies prostrate—and he will go out of his way to do a good turn to a political foe, once the fight is over.

Much of Churchill's life has been a mark of interrogation. Sometimes his objectives have been obscure, but the one thing that strikes any close reader of the story of his life is his consistency of aim. To the casual observer this might appear a strange—almost an untrue—statement; the close student of his doings and sayings will not doubt it.

In war, the plan that carried us to victory in Europe in 1945 was, in essentials, that which had been worked out in the fertile brain of Winston Churchill in World War I. The air-defence of Britain which in this war saved so many lives and, in the end, probably proved the main turning point in the conflict saving us from defeat, was, in essence, that which Churchill had devised in response to a whispered request from Kitchener at a Cabinet meeting, back in 1914. The tanks that swept all before them in the invasion of Hitler's Fortress Europe in 1944 and 1945, all grew from that queer and laughable contraption Winston Churchill designed and forced into use in the first World War.

It is the same in domestic affairs. Away back when he was a promising young man, he invented the Labour Exchanges which made the provision of employment something better, something with greater recognition of the "stature of man" than tramping from one works to another, with harsh snubs at the end of the journey. Long years intervened before he was again in a post where he could act directly in the interests of the un-influential—but when he became Chancellor of the Exchequer two decades later, one of his first acts was to extend the widows' pensions scheme.

Many interrogation marks remain. Will he abandon the field of social betterment, as he never abandoned a battlefield, when the battle is not yet won? Can the determination that produced the Mulberry Port and other "impossibilities," steered the nation from the disasters of 1940 to the overwhelming victories of 1945, quail before the tasks of reconstruction, of winning the fruits of triumph over the foreign foe?

Can a mind so resourceful and original as that which, away back in the dark days, saw, afar off, the certainty

of victory when others saw only the nearness of defeat, give in before the problems of economics?

The answer to those questions I am not competent to give. You, Gentle Reader, must answer them for yourself.

THE END

